

# **VARSITY OUTDOOR CLUB JOURNAL**



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## A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Lucas Braun

**M**y first VOC trip was in October of 2021. It was a workhike to Harrison Hut. I was a new first-year student, living on my own for the first time and looking for a place to belong. I had told my family that I would focus hard on my studies, but that I would allow myself to join one club. I wanted to find an outdoor club that was low commitment (I laugh at that now), ran trips every weekend, and did a wide variety of activities. When I first made my way to UBC campus, I happened to find a book in the bookstore: the VOC Centennial Book. I had no idea what varsity meant, but it seemed to more than fit the bill. You could mountaineer in a club at UBC? As a teenager raised on a steady diet of Jon Krakauer, I resolved to join immediately.

Getting on a trip proved to be difficult. I tried my best to get onto the Indian Arm Kayaking trip, but alas, I was too far down on the committed list. The disappointment of being turned away stung, but I was undeterred. I bet fewer people will want to do a workhike, I told myself as I signed up for the Harrison Workhike. It turned out that many people would absolutely want to do a workhike, but I made it onto the trip regardless. This is how I ended up in Isaac Borrego's car, pulling up to a random pullout in Pemberton Meadows in the rain at 11:00 p.m. on a Friday. Jeff Mottershead was busy herding people into tents, establishing a 5:00 a.m. wakeup, and keeping the whole crew dialled. On Saturday, we were off, performing backbreaking trail construction in the pouring rain. On this trip, I met Anya Boardman, Adam Steele, Cassandra Elphinstone, Tom Curran, and so many more people. People I would end up creating the best memories of my life with. The concept of love at first sight is a cliché. But I felt it on this trip. Within the VOC, I had found my home.

2025 to 2026 has seen a whirlwind of activity for the club. The first being our third massive hut construction project over July and August, to replace the walls at the Brian Waddington hut. Jeff Mottershead and John Sherk were once again instrumental in leading the construction efforts. John Sherk and Aaron Lee notably stayed at the hut for over a month. The project saw many highlights (too many to relay), from Joseph Chiao and Ryan MacDonald carrying enough lumber to crush a small horse over one night, to Raven Butterfield's allegedly delicious rice and beans. If you have a chance to visit Phelix,

please take some time to appreciate Sean McKay's beautiful mural dedicated to the construction efforts (speak friend, and enter).

The exec team hit the ground sprinting in September. Elizabeth Chu coordinated a very wet and very awesome glacier school, while Kevin McKay took charge of Rock Party, bringing his signature brand of wit and chaos to the festivities. James Kissane redefined what a watersports coordinator could do, and through his many trips and workshops, cultivated a very vibrant and stoked paddling community here in the VOC (all while writing an honours thesis on the side, I may add). AC Mueller did a power of work on recruiting members over Imagine Day, Clubs Day, and VOC info night. It's safe to say her massive efforts paid off, as the club nearly hit 2000 members before September 30.

Hannah Saarimaki and Joseph Chiao continued to coordinate workhikes well into the fall, including many hauling trips that removed evidence of construction from Phelix. And thanks to the advocacy efforts of John Conlon and Duncan MacIntyre, the club received excellent news from the provincial government about plans to move the Harrison Hut gate to provide us access to Perkins Main once again (a feat that seemed impossible when I started out in exec). If you have ever used or plan to use one of our huts, be sure to thank these folks and the countless others whose labours allow them to exist.

Sunny Das spearheaded the IDEA committee, seamlessly taking the reins from Brianna Ragsdale. Together, they implemented a number of initiatives to make the club less intimidating, more accessible, and more fun. These included continued AST scholarships, a new photo wall in the clubroom, a new layout to the clubroom door, and several trips for women and LGBTQ+ members to find community within the club and in the outdoors.

One of the true stars of the show this year was Emily Wood, who, for years, was sending in silence to produce a new website for the club, which finally launched this January. It's hard to convey just how much work she put into this project over so much time, but the results speak for themselves. Please raise a glass to Emily if you see her.

Unfortunately, this term was also marked by tragedy. In May of 2025, Mateja Clifford passed away while highlining near Squamish, BC. Mateja was a beloved member of the VOC, the Aviary, and the slacklining community and had just finished her program in mechanical engineering here at UBC. Her loss is and will continue to be deeply felt.

For the sake of the editor of this wonderful journal, Tra Mi, I can't thank everyone individually who contributed to the club this year. There are simply too many of you. Just know that you have my sincerest thanks and kudos, and I hope we can continue to get out into the mountains together well into the future.

If not readily obvious from the prior paragraphs, the best thing the

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VOC has is its community. A community of wonderfully weird, unique, crazy, and zany people. People who go for it, no matter what silly things like logic or common sense dictate. People who lug banjos through kilometres of slide alder to a hut to have a jam. People who decide mountaineering in rubber boots with universal crampons is optimal (don't do this). People who look for any excuse to strip naked and plunge into the coldest water they can find. People with hearts, who deeply care for each other, watch out for each other, and experience all life has to offer together. If I could say anything to myself from five years ago, glimpsing the Centennial Book in the bookstore for the first time, or to the person new to the club that now holds this journal in their hands, I would say this: be bold, take that leap, and enjoy everything this club has to offer. As much as I hate to quote it, I think the UBC slogan applies very heavily to the VOC. Tuum Est. It is yours. You get out what you put in, and when you seize on the opportunities this club provides – no matter how scary, or out there, or ambitious, or foolish they seem – what you get out is life-changing.

- Lucas

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# THE EXEC

## 2025-2026

**Lucas Braun** PRESIDENT



**Sunny Das** EDI COORDINATOR



**Lucy Perkins** VICE PRESIDENT

**Zachary Wirth** TREASURER



**AC Muller** MEMBERSHIP CHAIR



**Sri Chaitanya**  
SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR



**Elizabeth Chu** TRIPS COORDINATOR



**Em Lion** CLIMBING COORDINATOR



**Kevin Mckay-Barona**  
SOCIAL COORDINATOR



**James Kissane**  
WATERSPORTS COORDINATOR



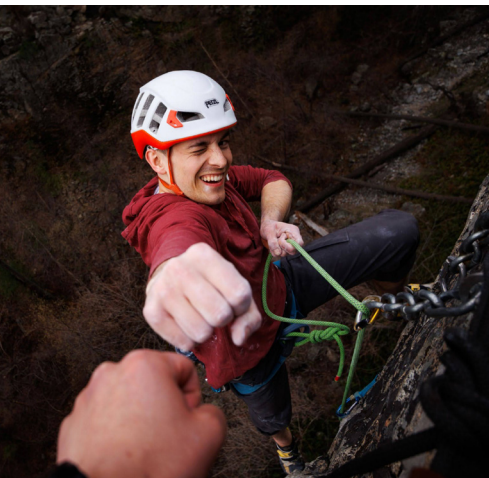
**Emily Wood**  
WEBMASTER



**Tristan Lefferts**  
VOCENE EDITOR



**Colette Bennett**  
SWAGMASTER



**Julian Larsen** LEGACY COORDINATOR



**Tra Mi Do Le** JOURNAL EDITOR

**John Conlon**

ACCESS COORDINATOR



**Hannah Saarimaki**

HUTS COORDINATOR



**Joseph Chiao**

TRAILS COORDINATOR



**Adam Steele** EXTERNAL RELATIONS



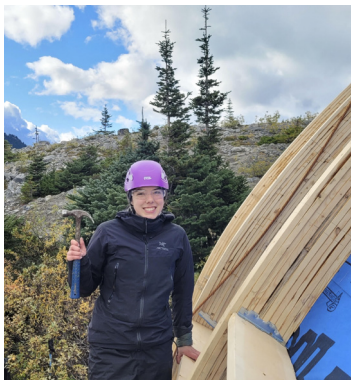
**Noah Wyse & Jasper Lincoln**

HEAD QUARTERMASTERS

**Melissa Chen**



**Katie Sattler**



**Maxine Pendras**



**Peach Trippell**



**Mya Knudsgaard**



**Aaron Lee**



**Ignatius Zhou**



**Timothy Lewis**



# QUARTERMASTERS

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# THE IDEA COMMITTEE REFLECTS

Sunny Das

**H**ey guys, I'm Sunny.

I've been the EDI coordinator for the past year, heading the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Action) committee of the VOC. First and foremost, I wanted to shoutout and appreciate the people that have significantly contributed to the committee's success for the past year: AC Muller, Bri Ragsdale, Elizabeth Chu, Raven Butterfield, John Sherk, Joseph Chiao, Katie Sattler, Lucas Braun, Lucy Perkins, Richina Chong, Tejas Vijay, Tristan Lefferts, and everyone else (you know who you are) who supported IDEA. Thank you for being the change you wish to see.

## **What is IDEA? IDEA is...**

- A space for all voices and people.
- A platform for conversation geared towards (and by!) groups that may be underrepresented in the outdoors (e.g., by gender, race, ability, etc).
- A place to plan initiatives to work on bridging barriers in the VOC and wider outdoor community
- A group of people to execute those plans with

I'll be breaking down our guiding principles and subsequent actions in the next four sections of this journal entry. I hope you enjoy the read and are inspired to join us at an IDEA meeting.

## **Inclusion (A Story)**

As a newcomer to the VOC in the fall of 2024, I was amazed. What do you mean people would organize trips to the mountains for strangers like me? What do you mean I don't need a car? What do you mean I get free gear rentals, see the most drop-dead gorgeous scenery I've ever seen in my life, and slowly come to know the generosity, spirit, and community that is the offer of this university club? I told everyone I knew about this gold mine I had discovered.

"But why is it called the Varsity Outdoor Club?" some people asked. "I can barely make it up the Wreck Beach stairs. That's not for me."

“Aren’t they all a clique?” others interjected. “They all know each other.”

“I don’t know the first thing about the outdoors,” many replied. “And I don’t have the money.”

“I just find them to be quite intimidating. They scare me.” - perhaps the most common response.

When you first get started in the club, everyone seems to know what they are doing. For those who are old and seasoned, do you remember that feeling of timidity and uncertainty walking in the door? For those who are new, do you feel like you’re the only one who feels that way? You might be wondering if this is the place for you. Maybe you don’t think you’re “varsity.” Or you don’t know anyone. Or you don’t know where to go for your first hike, or if you need snowshoes. Maybe you think you’re too slow. While some of these questions are universal, some may be more personal. Maybe you don’t see gear that fits you in the clubroom. Maybe you do not have spare cash.

I don’t want to pretend like I have all the answers - or that the club does. But here is what I want to affirm, before getting into the details of what we in IDEA do to help alleviate these barriers:

You change the VOC by becoming a part of the VOC. Our culture is not static - we are an organization in flux. Nothing is set in stone. Passion carries us through and all the rest is details. So don’t feel like you have to fit into any mould. Don’t feel like you need an Arcteryx jacket. Bring yourself, bring your energy, and that is more than enough.

### **Diversity (A Statement)**

The VOC inherently attracts a diverse group of people. Not only in terms of what we like to do in the outdoors, but also our backgrounds, our comfort with different types of gear, our cardio and strength training abilities, our mother tongues, our random hobbies, our degrees. It’s the diversity of the VOC that makes it truly great. We all do different things, but at the end of the day, we all share the same passion for being outdoors.

Of course, it is not all rosy colours. We recognize as a club that there are legitimate power structures at play in our society, and the VOC is not immune from them. While we do not wish to tokenize, belittle, or over-emphasize anyone’s demographic identity, we do strive to hold each other accountable for the way we treat each other. The IDEA committee supports this paramount value in the practice of listening. By fostering a culture of care and attention to individual needs, preferences, and worldviews, rather than assuming, blaming, dismissing, or ignoring, we as a committee and as a club can help nurture our inherent diversity and open us up to possibilities of further integration.

As a committee, our established place in the club as a space to listen and respond to all individual identity-based thoughts and concerns, is perhaps our most valuable role as an entity.

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## **Equity (An Ideal)**

“Perfect equity” means that everyone has equal opportunities to resources and opportunities according to their starting points in a society. Equity thus requires addressing disadvantages, systemic inequalities, and delivering tailored resources to marginalized groups.

In our bottom-up, self-organized manner of meeting and conversation, IDEA strives to balance a goal-oriented approach to bridging these barriers as well as an open, drop-in-whenever kind of space to hang out around like-minded people. Part of our work as a committee is to identify the limits of our capacity. These limits include budget, domain/skill knowledge, and time.

If you are passionate about equity in the outdoors and have expertise in grant writing, a specific outdoor skill, or ample time, I encourage you to pop by a meeting or two to brainstorm what you could do to contribute.

## **Action (A List)**

This year, we have facilitated:

- Women's/gender diverse trips: Shoutout to the “Girls Gone Wild” ski touring series
- Beginner-Friendly trips and series: Such as the Seymour Thursday Night Ski opportunities
- VOC x UBC Surf Club Beginner Outdoors Workshop
- AST Scholarships: 5 scholarships of \$200 awarded to members facing financial barriers to the outdoors to get their avalanche safety training certification.
- Photo Wall: to enhance diverse representation within the clubroom
- Club-wide survey: to continue to track sentiments and feedback from the broader VOC community
- Social events: to help facilitate connections between people of similar backgrounds

Next year, it would be cool to look into:

- UBC and community grants: to run trips, get more gear, or promote our activities
- Facilitating more collaborative events with other UBC clubs
- Reaching out to companies and/or going onto Facebook Marketplace to look for more options for our gear room
- Continuing to disseminate the club survey to track changing preferences in the club
- Upgrading the display case to include more representative photos and images of club activity

The VOC strives to be inclusive and welcoming, but there is always

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more we can do. I hope that IDEA meetings in the future will view this “work” as a challenge and will accomplish tasks with energy and excitement. At the same time, I want to remind everyone to give themselves grace. Perfect equity is an ideal, but this is not a perfect world. We are a university club, and if we mess up, slip up, goof around, or have one too many waffle mornings (impossible), that is ok. We’re all learning. Sometimes meetings suck. Limiting our imagination to ‘one way’ or method to accomplish these goals is counterproductive.

*I'll end off where I started:*

You change the VOC by becoming a part of the VOC. Our culture is not static - we are an organization in flux. Nothing is set in stone. Passion carries us through and all the rest is details. So don't feel like you have to fit into any mold. Don't feel like you need an Arcteryx jacket. Bring yourself, bring your energy, and that is more than enough.

See you on the trail,

- Sunny

### **P.S. \*A logistical note\***

At this year's January AGM, I proposed to merge the EDI Coordinator role with the Vice President role. The vote passed, and so this structural change in leadership will take place next year. This switch will not get rid of the IDEA committee - it will simply be the VP in charge, as it was two years ago.

There are a few reasons I had in mind when proposing this shift, if you are wondering what that was all about. First, I did not want people to mistake the IDEA committee as “my” committee, or the “EDI Coordinator's committee.” It is a club committee. Second, establishing the VP as a person in charge of the IDEA committee will avoid tokenization of the EDI coordinator and the role itself. Inclusivity should be ingrained in our club's culture, not a side show. Third, both Brianna Ragsdale (former VP/EDI coordinator) and I agreed that the role would function better under the leadership of the VP. For these various reasons, it made sense for me to switch the leadership back to how it was before.

Going forward, regardless of the title of the IDEA coordinator, I am excited to see what the committee has to offer.

Thanks for a great year!

IN MEMORY OF  
**Mateja Clifford**



## REMEMBERING MATEJA

*Friends of Mateja*

I met Mateja on a VOC trip going to Smith, Rock Oregon. We instantly became close and the following years I was lucky to get to know her and have a wonderful friend who was always there for me. Mateja was fun-loving, strong willed and unstoppable. She always pushed me out of my comfort zone, to try new things and climb things I didn't think I could, and be a better person. She lived by her values and loved her friends fiercely. She was resilient, strong and gentle with a beautiful soul and kind spirit. I remember the day I got into graduate school and she was so proud she took me out for cinnamon buns. The moment she got into UBC, she called me and we screamed and giggled with joy. There wasn't a moment that went by spent with Mateja that wasn't filled with joy. The last time I saw her, April 2025, we planted my garden, made bouquets of flowers and she planted a tree. This tree stands tall in my backyard and has started to flower again this spring. Mateja made it easy to be yourself and to open up. All the love and light she brought into our lives will forever be with us, and we'll cherish every memory. I was so lucky to be her friend. She forever lives on in our hearts and she continues to inspire me every day. Mateja's life was too short, but the 22 years she did have, she lived to the fullest.

*- Emilie McGuire*



**I**t still doesn't feel real. I thought that maybe after going to her celebration of life at the highlining house it might. Or that maybe after not seeing her outside of the Chan Centre after what should have been her grad ceremony it might. I'm honestly quite glad that I won't be in Vancouver this year for my birthday, because I won't have to face my annual birthday potluck without her in attendance, my last one being the last time I saw her. Unsurprisingly I suppose, there's no timeline; I still feel that bottom falling out from under me feeling when I think about losing Mateja, along with a thought of 'what the fuck'. I'm also feeling angry that this is the fourth year in a row that necessitates some sort of In Memoriam journal section and that I wrote something for Will's three years ago too.

I could write a lot about Mateja, about how intelligent, strong, witty, and beautiful she was. About what a strong advocate she was, her amazing listening ear, and how she gave the best hugs (everyone agrees on this point). About how excited she was at my potluck telling us about her cool grad school acceptance for the fall. About how I'd give anything to have one more tea spilling chat with her. A lot of that has already been said though, so I'll recount a favourite memory. This story took place on the now infamous BYOA (bring your own axe) woodchopping workhike to Brew that Mona and I led in 2022. Our singular task for this workhike was to chop all of the big wood rounds that had been flown in earlier. It had been a truly chaotic time organizing this trip, with usual driver faff involved, compounded by it being a beginner friendly trip with an unexpected snowfall causing us to pivot to snowshoeing. I felt particularly mentally fried. Of course, due to the snow, we couldn't initially find the wood - another blow to my energy. Upon finding the tarp it was under, most of the guys set about chopping the wood while the rest of us helped the beginners get settled and dry at the hut. Soon the guys came inside and reported that the wood was simply too big (or maybe too frozen) to be chopped. My heart sank, seeing as it was our only task (and because of that aforementioned organizational chaos). Mateja left the hut pretty subtly. Within a few minutes, she came back in and proudly announced that she had gotten a good stick



and split in one of the rounds. Predictably, this reinvigorated the guys (and everyone else) and we all had a perfectly productive woodchopping trip, but I'll never forget her smug little smirk at having gotten the first "impossible" split.

The lessons learned from losing someone in the mountains obviously never outweigh the absolute shittiness of it. I don't think I can take solace in the feeble reminders of best practices that are trotted out by well-meaning friends or even my own grieving thoughts after these incidents. Check your knots, your footing, your systems. Yeah. Great. Even better: tell your people that you love them and make sure you give them a hug.

We miss you, Mateja. My small, hopeful thought arising from this is that now, somewhere, you and Will are surely slacklining together.

*- Sonia Landwehr*

--

**T**he day before I found out, I was talking with a coworker about loss; for myself, it was Will three years ago, and for the coworker, a cousin. But lightning doesn't strike twice, we said. We figured we'd both gone through enough. Maybe we were safe.

But lightning does strike twice, and yes, you can lose two dear friends, and a community can grieve many times over, and here I am almost a year later obsessively imagining what it would be like for each of my friends to die. I've seen it twice before.

Mateja and I were close friends. We met at Rock Party in my first year at UBC, and I felt like I already knew her, right from the start. She was so warm, so natural, so hilarious, and fearless on the wall. I wanted to be like her, but I settled for being her friend.

And what a gift that friendship was. Mateja knew exactly how to support me, how to make me laugh, how to cheer me up. She was driven and passionate: she always had climbing goals to work towards, or battles to fight in her school life, or friends to defend. Oh, I knew she'd slug someone if they messed with me. Mateja was incredibly loyal and caring, and strong. I miss her stoke and zest for life. Despite the pain we have all felt about her loss, I'm so grateful for her and our memories together.

I don't really know how to face the world knowing that she's not in it, and I'm tired of remembering that she's not there each time I have something I want to share with her. I wish we could have one more tea-spilling session, that I could hear her giggle one more time, that I could get one last warm hug.

This summer I hiked up a mountain and spoke to the sky, if that's where they are, and said, "Take care of her, Will". I hope they're hanging out

together somewhere, talking about slack lining and the latest Reel Rock. I hope I won't have any more friends who will join them up there.

Hug your friends, tell them you love them, be silly and joyous and vulnerable! I think she'd be happy to see that.

I think about you every day. We miss you, queen. Thank you for everything.

Poem:

### self improvement

since you left i've been busy with mindless things.  
i've hemmed shirts,  
ground coffee,  
scrubbed sinks.  
i've moved, three times, packed and unpacked shoeboxes of trinkets.  
i've hummed and hawed over a boy,  
and a girl,  
without you to tell me if i'm right or wrong.  
i've thought about how absence feels different than lack of presence.

i've looked out at a glacier and tried to remember why:  
why we turn these endless circles,  
why we laugh, and why we live.  
i've become scared of the D word (depression),  
because i'm scared of how familiar it feels,  
and how normal it can feel to drown,  
slowly,  
sinking without much resistance.  
i've seen dragonflies, again, and thought it was you.  
i haven't learned from you the way i thought —  
humans will never better themselves.  
self improvement is for losers.

- Fiona Landwehr



## VOCJ68

The first climbing trip I went on was to Smith Rock, Oregon. I met Mateja when we ended up in the same car for the nearly ten-hour drive. As many people in the VOC probably know, rock climbing can be intimidating. I certainly felt that as a beginner, showing up to these huge walls surrounded by so many experienced climbers.

Not knowing anyone on the trip, I spent a lot of time climbing with and getting to know Mateja. She was always friendly and stoked to be outside with other people. She encouraged me to join her on another trip to Leavenworth the following week, which helped catapult me into the world of outdoor climbing and helped me find a community of climbers at UBC.

We spent many sessions together in the Aviary, hanging out on campus, and skiing or climbing in the Sea to Sky. Mateja was energetic, outgoing, and always able to lift low spirits. I'm grateful that my first experiences in the climbing community included someone like Mateja. Her enthusiasm and openness helped turn something intimidating into something welcoming, and that kindness is something I'll always remember when I think about her.

- *Julian Larsen*

**In Memoriam-** Memories of Mateja: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-Bv3ElyucvB6aKyLfBKy21LKjrmk7kKY>





A black helicopter is shown in flight against a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A long, thin rope extends from the helicopter down to a large, dark, cylindrical bag suspended in the air. The background features a scenic mountain landscape with a calm lake, dense evergreen forests, and rugged, rocky peaks. In the foreground, there are several tall, green pine trees and some construction materials on the ground.

# **PHELIX WALLS REPAIRS**

## Building More Than Just a Hut

*John Sherk*

**I**t was just over two years ago when I wandered into the VOC clubroom and was greeted by friendly and welcoming former club president Sonia Landwehr. I immediately joined the club and attended the Winter AGM the next day. I sat there in complete awe listening to Sonia talk all about the 2023 roof construction on The Brian Waddington Hut. “Man, I would love to do something like that!” I said to myself. I got to attend Burns and Turns for my first VOC trip and hut visit that February. “Wow!” “This club is sooo cool!” I thought to myself, as I followed suit with 30 others, A-framed my skis on my pack, and started the trek from the winter lot up to Phelix trail for Burns and Turns. Since that first moment of awe and all trips since, I found myself reflecting... “What is it about this club that makes it what it is?” To some, it’s the trips, it’s the friendships made, or the mentorship we’ve received and passed down. To others, it’s the big lines, the climbing projects, the ski traverses, and the epic trip reports. Could it also be the faff of a beginner trip and the cluttered but cool clubroom? And what about the workhikes?

I realized that what makes the VOC club what it is is a bunch of united visions for adventure. When groups of people join a trip, their individual efforts and interests are brought together. They meet each other and become connected through various means. They share gear, advice, travel arrangements, shelter, and food. They are encouraging each other, looking out for each other, and suffering with each other. They are summiting together, celebrating, returning in victory together, or denying a dangerous snow pack and saving the mountain pursuit for another day. When you bring enough of these adventures together, people begin to belong in the energy they’ve created. That energy and that connection are at the core of a club.

A hut construction project is a huge vision for adventure, though not just one singular adventure. These hut projects lay the foundation for a multitude of adventures for a long time to come, for a lot of people. When we work on

our huts, we create the foundations for those visions, not solely because of the hut we create, but also because of the people that we engage with in the process. We aren't just replacing walls; we are replacing walls alongside our fellow members. We're hammering plywood with the people we ski tour with, reframing stud frames with trail running buddies, installing windows with those we've practiced rolling kayaks with, and hauling construction garbage with fellow snowcavers. These experiences solidify old friendships and spark new ones, they inspire new adventures and educate us on our individual pursuits of belonging, purpose, limitation, and freedom.

Our huts are not entirely our club; our vision should always be much bigger than their offerings, but I think the energy they embody through community-focused adventure and service lies at the core of what makes the VOC legacy so great. In my opinion the wall replacement project on the Brain Waddington Hut in summer 2025 was successful because the combined efforts of the 100 some people in the following list weren't just building a hut but were also building a club. Thanks to all of those involved. May all our paths continue to cross as we never stop building what makes the VOC the VOC.

*A non-exhaustive list of the amazing helpers at Phelix:*

*Aaron Lee, AC Muller, Adam Kader, Adam Steele, Addison Ross, AJ Dreher, Alex Rigby, Alexander Liu, Anahita Niksirat, Alberto Tancon, Anton Afanassiev, Artur Zelik, Ben Duyker, Ben Sommerfeld, Brandon Wales, Cameron Varcoe, Catherine Phuong, Chris Snell, Connor Jakes, Dave MacKenzie, Devon Das, Diego Fernandez, Duncan MacIntyre, Eemaan Alam, Eleanor Hsuin, Elizabeth Chu, Ella Lowe-Ng, Ellen Scott, Ellington Peacock, Emma Plewes, Eva Cowley, Filipa Fay Moreira, Grace Holling, Haley Foladare, Hamish Robertson, Hannah Bates, Hannah Saarimaki, Hermine Waldenmaier, Ignatius Zhou, Imogen Hayes, Iris Kaufman, Jacob Grossbard, James Kissane, Jason Galbraith, Jasper Lincoln, JD Mclean, Jeff Mottershead, Jenna Senna, Jess Lok, Jillian Heidecker, JJ James, Joanne Ho, John Chan, John Sherk, Jonathan Schirle, Joseph Chiao, Josh Chik, Julia Tancon, Kathleen Griffin, Katie Glasspoole, Kayla Linden, Ketan Desai, Kevin McKay, Lucas Rucchin, Lucia Figueras Pont, Lucy Perkins, Lucy Roberts-Lovell, Luis Mueller, Maiya Callister, Makoto HW, Marius Barthillat, Mark Choi, Marko Smitran, Megan Haas, Mical Huang, Mitchel Soederberg, Natacha Vives, Nelson Fretenburg, Patric Berard, Raditya Rizqia, Rafael Ferrer, Raven Butterfield, Renee King, Robert Cianewski, Robert Cole Gauthier, Robin Vinod, Ryan MacDonald, Sam Kohlmann, Samantha Yee, Sara Bellman, Sasha Roosen-Saba, Sean Dempsey, Sean McKay, Sebastian Patton, Shravan Kumar, Skyler Sauer, Sri Chaitanya, Stefaniya Rekasius, Sudha Kotapalli, Sunny Das, Tobias Jaeggi, Toji Nakabayashi, Tom Curran, Tom Koenig, Tra Mi Do Le, Tristan Russell, Vivian Liu, Wendy Xiang, etc.*

## The Quadrapod of Duncan

*John Sherk*

The Brian Waddington (Phelix) Hut wall replacement project began on July 11, 2025. The first stage was demolition. The demo crew had completed a heavy tool haul up to the hut and began stripping the old siding and insulation off the existing walls. I wasn't able to be present for the first few days of the demolition stage, so I chatted with Duncan MacIntyre in the weeks prior about what some of our goals could be for strategically setting up the worksite. Both of us recalled our epic time working on the Sphinx Hut roof replacement in Fall 2024. We reflected on the suffering. Let me take you back to this Sphinx Hut construction memory for a few minutes...

Jeff Mottershead, Anton Afanassiev, Aaron Lee, Ignatius Zhou, and I had arrived via canoe in the dark rain of September 24th. Duncan and Ryan MacDonald had been up at the Hut for the previous two days, deconstructing the metal exterior. Anton, Jeff, and I worked a marathon the night and day prior so we could stage the materials for the helicopter and unload the old siding that Duncan and Ryan had been removing. Our task for the first day was to continue extracting the old tongue and groove off the ribbed frame while adding the new tongue and groove onto the other side. The work was hard, the weather was wet and cold, and the conditions were miserable.

Duncan and I began the conversation probably around 11 am on September 25th. "Ok we should start thinking about lunch.... There is absolutely no way we can meet here." Both our eyes gawking in disgust at the state of the hut. Soggy insulation soup, infused with mouse poop dripped from the ceiling of the upper loft, everything was wet, sloshy, mushy, and gross. The green, holey tarp held delicately on one side fluttered as the wind ran through the space where half the roof boards had been removed. There was a confusing array of backcountry gear, construction tools, industrial hardware and old hut things strewn about. Understanding the urgency and casting a vision for our hungry

stomachs, Duncan and I contemplated, “Okay we need to move the bins, we can’t eat here...” “Ok, what if we hang the tarp somewhere over here?”... “Wait there are no trees, just that little one. “Also we should move all the bins, hmmm...” The tongue and groove coming off the hut roof was piled about. There were still a few strong planks in the piles. With the help of Ryan and Duncan, I went about constructing a four-legged Frankenstein pyramid out of 12” structural screws and the non-rotten tongue and groove boards. It was... beautiful... in a way. We ran a cord from it to the tallest of all the little trees (at most 3 ft high). As low as it was, we now had a tarp line! I hung my big orange MEC super tarp from the line and tied the edges and corners to piled tongue and groove and bushes around the area.

This camp became our abode for breaks from our atrociously long work “shifts”. We were so glad to be protected by it, but honestly, the setup was not ergonomically pleasing in the slightest. Afraid we might lose the tarp to the high winds, I had roped it down fairly significantly, its height limited by the tension and the short trees. We awkwardly hunched over our food operations, positions that highlighted the shoulder muscle tensions



*Top to bottom*

**1 Sri Chaitanya**

**2 Jacob Grossbard**

**Left & Right John Sherk**



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of our most enjoyable joist hammering duties. Under that tarp, we listened to Jeff's wild adventure stories and had five square meals per day. Those meals could have been 7 am, 12 noonish, 6 pm ish, 12 midnight-ish and maybe 4 am? With a lack of seating, we played musical chairs on the food and spice bins and enjoyed tiptoeing ever so delicately between all the stoves set up on the ground between us. It was here that we tested and coined "tuna-oat-orade," and my boot defended our camp from sneaky mice that found their way into our food bins. It was truly paradise.

Bounce back to tales from summer 2025... as you can tell, Duncan and I were motivated to create something better than our experience at Sphinx. I encouraged him to take his time and pick a place that would be perfect. He did a stand up job. The tables and benches from the hut were placed alongside the creek access by the lake about 50 meters from the hut. A blue tarp was hung between the trees over the tables. The food bins sat off to one side. It was a world of luxury in comparison to our setup at Sphinx. How nice it was to sit at a table with ergonomic benches and enjoy leaning over the table during dinner break.

There were so many tools for Phelix, sooo many different types of hardware, sooo many screws, so many bits, so many things, nails for this, caulking for three different applications, 30 hammers, battery chargers galore and so many drills. It was such a nightmare to organize because everything came up in separate backpacks and was often used all at the same time. It was very difficult to assign locations for things with no tool bays, boxes or Milwaukee packouts to be organized into. There was a box of 100 different kinds of nails, presumably mostly straight. Roofing screws from last year's project, paint cans, and a plethora of different structural screws for the walls. All of these things desperately needed a place to live, a place to be organized and most importantly a place to be found when the construction with them started.

In those first few days, I assigned the fun task of making sawhorses so we could have a raised work surface. The first saw horses turned into a tool table. As soon as that happened it became very apparent that we needed a tarp, and for that, we needed a really high attachment point. My struggle generally on the project was understanding what I could delegate and what I needed to work on myself because of the complexities of the task. "Okay John what can I do?" Duncan keenly inquired. This became the popular phrase I dreaded hearing because this meant that there was a lull in my capacities to align people with work, which meant that they finished their current task (hopefully sufficiently), and I hadn't finished my own which was to figure out what they needed to do next. "Well Duncan let's see..." "Oh! I know something. We really need to hang a tarp for a tool and hardware table. Could I assign this task to you? Pick a spot with some good trees, hang a tarp? It needs to be high enough so we can work under it, put things on a table, etc., etc." After a brief discussion

I sent him and a few others free to begin their wanderings and ponderings. I monitored from afar and in a few minutes they reported back with their findings and ideas. I approved their proposal and they began assembling a nicer, taller version of the pyramid we had made use of at Sphinx. The completed version was tall and sturdy. A few lengths of paracord were run between the trees by the river and the structure and the supertarp hung over the top. Unlike our camp of Sphinx, we could almost confidently stand underneath the tarp which was a very good thing because everyone spent a lot of time under it looking for tools and bits, caulking, swapping batteries in and out, or searching for the infamously missing door screws. The structure that held that tarp up was a complete success. I named it the Quadrapod of Duncan.

With a number of construction delays due to the ever-so complex wall systems used in timber frame construction, the quadrapod stayed set up until late August. Its height achieved by Duncan standing on a step ladder, was absolutely necessary for protection and efficiency. The tarp it held up was the cornerstone of our tool storage. The quadrapod didn't shift or move, although a few good 2x6 boards were extracted for extra frame replacements. Some say the Quadrapod was hideous but I say it was glorious, it was like the salt of the earth, an essential component to the construction site. Life would have been miserable without it.

**Photo** A hut without walls *Jacob Grossbard & Imogen Hayes*



## Like Toothpicks Dancing on the Shore

*John Sherk*

Two weeks was the original estimation for the wall replacement of the Brian Waddington Hut, but it was quickly realized to be utterly impossible. The processes of disassembly and reassembly were complicated. We continually ran into setbacks and complexities as we discovered the required methods to properly build a vapour barrier within a timber-frame. We could not simply remove the interior panelling and apply the vapour barrier from the inside. The walls themselves needed to be taken completely off the hut. This was not an easy process, as most of the bottom plates of the walls were toe nailed below the flooring of the hut. So we often had no choice but to crack a lot of the bottom plates in the removal of the first-floor walls. We had not anticipated having to replace this many 2x6's, and the lumber supply under the hut quickly proved to be insufficient for what we needed. "Dammit, we are going to need more 2x6 by TENS!" In the back of our mind, we started creating a list of all the items we needed to elegantly haul up to the hut.

The wall extraction along the backside of the hut and the front two alcoves revealed how complicated the interface between the flooring supports for the second floor overhang and the roof vapour barrier was going to be. These supports joists had become mouse havens, rotten, chewed insulation rained down upon their removal. These locations had become subject to various visitors; we found three entire bird skeletons that had flown into the soffit area and down into a joist space.

The interface between the second floor, the vapour barrier and the roof line kept Jacob Grossbard and I occupied for a lengthy amount of time. "Alright, I think we are ready... could you guys get the vapour barrier?" In a few minutes, Lucy Roberts-Lovell and Stefanija Rekasius returned, lightly carrying in a single hand two of the skinniest rolls of plastic I had ever seen. My stomach sank. It's typically difficult to carry one roll of vapour barrier over your shoulder. Much to our dismay, we discovered that there was a packing mistake and rather than receiving a 6 mil vapour barrier, we were supplied with two rolls of painters poly.

Painters poly has the rough structural integrity of tissue paper, so there was no way we could use it for the wall construction. Production was paused, we couldn't move any further, and we needed to go into Pemberton for supply.

Stefanija and I trail-ran down from Phelix and drove into Pemberton. As soon as we reached cell service, we pulled over to a side development and phoned Jeff. Our conversation lasted for an hour as I updated him on all of the new complicated and unanticipated developments of the wall deconstruction. After sharing photos, drawn over AutoCAD images, and racking my brain to keep up with his explanations, we came up with a viable plan to move forward. I felt more confident as we were now on the same page. We drove on into Pemberton, reaching the lumber yard in a fashionable 30 min before they closed to acquire 2x6x10's vapour barrier, more nails and various tools. After a trip to the hardware store, the grocery store and everyone's favourite Mcdonalds we headed back up to Phelix.

We reached the trail again around 9 pm, and we were quickly joined by Jacob, Imogen Hayes, Aaron Lee, Makoto Hanyu and Anton Afanassiev to assist us with the lumber haul. We began the entertaining process of strapping 10' pieces of lumber to our packs. It was hilarious seeing Anton attempt to walk around with a plank of lumber extending 8' above his head. It haphazardly shifted inside his backpack and waved back and forth, threatening a deadly jousting match with anyone he came close to. With some experimentation and laughter, we came to possible hiking arrangements. Aaron's creativity and bizarre commitment to ridiculous mountain suffering resulted in A-framing the 2x6x10's to his pack. For added class, he elegantly hung a piece of firewood at the very top with a ski strap. I shook my head in disbelief, thinking he would have to readjust as soon as we hit the uphill. Shockingly, he suffered his way through the whole 5 km hike, somehow surviving every overhead tree branch. I chuckled from the rear as we walked around the lake. The 10' boards were waving back and forth like toothpicks dancing on the shore in the moonlight. Exhausted, we arrived back at the hut at midnight. The next day, now equipped with 2x6's, real vapor barrier and a bunch of nails, the Wall Replacement Project continued. Complexities and unknowns continued to slow us down in the days to come, but we knew that slow progress was still good progress, especially with good company.

Said toothpicks on the Shore **Left** *Jacob Grossbard* **Right** *John Sherk*



## It's the Hammer not the Man

*John Sherk*

It's very apparent that the VOC has gotten away with spending as little as possible on tools. I get it, good equipment is expensive, and if you have to choose between funding outdoor gear or hut building tools, well then the correct answer is obvious... BUT, the fundamental difficulty is that when efficiency is a necessity and the tool that is available isn't quite the right one for the job, the process of backcountry hut construction can become a long, drawn-out nightmare. This was a discovery we made in the most blatant way on the 2024 Burton Hut roof replacement. Anyone from the crew working on the roof can tell you how impossible it was to drive a 10D nail through a joist hanger into a 2x10. This difficulty amplified itself exponentially with the use of a hammer more appropriate for hanging picture frames on drywall rather than a wafflehead framing hammer. Anton Afanassiev came to the conclusion that our efficiency issues were a tool competency problem and not a user one. I recall him proclaiming in frustration in the darkness of the night... "It's the hammer not the man!" as nails bent and bounced away with every throw from a flat-faced, light, non-framing hammer. The stubborn  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plywood sheets bent over the curved Sphinx roof were very hard to nail into. On multiple occasions, Jacob and I tried our best to hold back our laughter as we watched Anton fling nail after nail out into the night sky.

After our 24-hour shifts pounding nails for eternity, Jacob Grossbard, Jeff Mottershead, Anton Afanassiev, and I were determined that the madness of ill-equipped hammers would not be repeated at the Phelix wall replacement. So when we started Phelix hut prep, we compensated, and we compensated hard. Our hammer count sitting out on the tool table during construction came in at 30! It was so good to have effective tools in our midst and to supply visiting labourers as best we could. At this point, though, could it have been helpful to also upgrade to a nail gun and compressor? Most definitely yes. In the midst

of surviving the day-to-day chaos, it's hard to cast visions for efficiency and determine what tools would make our lives easier.

We were glad that we put some initiative towards acquiring some club tool belts. Efficiency greatly improved.

In contrast to the seclusion of the Burton Roof project, there were a ton of people out on the Phelix trail over the duration of the Brian Waddington Hut construction, which lasted from July 11 to roughly mid August. It was of course posted on the website that the hut was closed for construction, but we could not close the mountain or the trail. As such, we spent a ton of time doing PR for the site and club, ensuring that those hiking through or staying in the vicinity remained free of risks and understood that there may be grinding and hammering that continues well into the darkness of the evening. The weekends were busy with hikers. I estimate that over the long weekend in July, there were over 70 people in the vicinity of Phelix. JD, a local firefighter from Whistler, and his partner were hiking in the area and camped near the lake by the hut. JD was quite keen to join in on the construction. After discovering we had an extra pair of steel toes and a helmet for him to use, he dove right in. Gosh, we were so glad to have him. He joined us for two evenings of 4 hours each, running nails into the second-floor joist frame supports.

Imogen Hayes, Aaron Lee, Sean McKay and Stefanjia Rekasius had spent countless hours constructing these joist frames to support the floor. Most of the previous joist frame lumber was still good, but it was very hard to run a nail into and the space between the joist frames was additionally quite small. It was hard to get a sufficient hammer swing. Standing on the scaffolding, hammering overhead in a small area is never an easy task.

We were averaging a nail success rate of about 1 in 7 nails, an absolutely terrible rate. Our weak skills continually bent the nails. We were burning through our supply at a terribly rapid rate. In our frustration, we started blaming the situation on the weakness of the nails, but when JD joined, we had to quickly put our whining away. Aaron, Anton, Jacob and I marveled at JD's ability to drive the spiral 3" nails so competently with power and accuracy. It's the hammer, not the man! theory was immediately defunct and our whimpy excuses were replaced with JD's coaching advice... "Hit hard, don't miss!" We celebrated his presence and were quite thankful that when he and his partner departed the hut, they helped us cart out some of our endless supply of garbage and cut-offs. Thanks for your hard work JD!

Our tool versus user debate did express itself on various other stages of the hut construction as well. A kudos goes out to Imogen, who at the beginning of the wall reassembly was caught with the glorious task of sanding off the hideous white paint stains along the interior of the timber frame with a less-than-efficient sanding tool. At the start we were lacking enough sanding sheets, but somehow with grit, muscle, and tuck tape, she pushed through

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to make it work. There were lulls in the reassembly process due to the many unknowns of moving forward. It was easy enough for me to assign various volunteers to sanding and tung oiling the interior timber frame, but it was more difficult to assign complicated trades tasks, given that I didn't always know the steps forward. I definitely tested the patience of those sanding though. Volunteers wanted more tangible skills to engage with than beautifying the hut with a sole sander for 8 hours a day. They wanted to swing a hammer, drive a nail, cut wood. Their suffering was not in vain though! The timber frame on the interior looks fantastic.

What would I change from a tool supply perspective if I could run the project again? Hmm... well, definitely I would have got a pneumatic or cordless nail gun and a palm nailer for those hard-to-reach joist spaces, oh, and we definitely needed a saw guide for our panel cutting. Additionally we also struggled with keeping the various hardware and tool components organized. It would have been justified to take a few extra laps and hike a bunch of Milwaukee tool boxes up to the hut. Cumulatively we spent days looking for misplaced tools, hardware, bits, saw blades, caulking. It really pays to have a flawless system, BUT in recognition of all the construction stages we went through, the final product that we produced and the diversity of volunteers in the process, many who were learning things for the first time, I think we did pretty damn well. Hats off to all those volunteers learning new skills. Your hands and minds came together and figured out A LOT of things. Ironically though, now that we finally have those skills and know-how, we won't have to use them for quite some time. I don't think there will be another full-out hut construction project ... at least we hope... for quite some time.



## Santa in July

*John Sherk*

*July 2025*

*Brian Waddington Hut*

**I**t was July 20th, 2025, out at the Brian Waddington Hut, and wall reconstruction was well underway. The demo crew had removed the exterior siding, and the bottom and top floor walls had been removed, and we were part way finished with the vapour barrier and raising the rest of the walls. We were in the midst of it all, and honestly, nothing about these processes seemed straightforward. Jacob Grossbard and I spent a significant amount of time thinking through the processes. We had been chatting with Jeff Mottershead via inReach throughout the week, discerning scaffolding feet, planks, vapour barrier design options, and relaying details on how much insulation we should reorder, given that much was destroyed with the mouse infestation and mold problems.

Jeff had compiled a manual of sorts for us to use for the sheet metal wall assembly. The idea was that in his absence, we could still make progress with assembling our new exterior. Inevitably, the faff had to come from somewhere though. It was discovered that there were a ton of steps to discern before the steel construction could even begin. We spent a significant amount of time puzzled about the best course of action. Thinking back to our two-week stint on the Burton Hut last year, we were totally blessed to have had Jeff there

**Photos above** *John Sherk*

the whole time. This project was different, though lots of unknowns, too many questions – we all just wished Jeff were there.

After confirming quantities of items to order, Jeff mentioned he was going to be there on Sunday morning. Great! We all sighed in relief and excitement, awaiting his presence with great expectation. We were thinking that with regular “Jeff departure times,” we could likely see him up at the hut by mid-morning, but late Sunday morning came around and no Jeff. It was first 9:00 am, then 10:00 am, and then 11:00 am. We started to ponder... “What time do you think Jeff will be here?” “I would have expected he’d be here by now.” “That’s unusual, well, it’s still morning, I’m sure he’ll be here soon.”

Jacob and I began work for the day on the back of the hut. We had been trying to understand how to treat the interface between the second floor framing, the underside of the roof line, and our new soffit hang height. It was not a simple task and I must admit I was not good at reading Jeff instruction manuals. Pondering and perplexed, we took a moment to gaze around... instantly looking back at each other in complete shock ... “Hey! Where did this scaffolding plank come from?” Our eyes wide in realization we both exclaimed “NOOO WAY!” We then turned and discovered that behind us chilling peacefully under the roofline was a new bail of insulation.

Instantly we broke out in simultaneous roaring laughter. The presence of these two things implied that sometime between when we went to bed at about midnight and when I got up at 6:00 am, Jeff had been making runs up the trail delivering bags of insulation and a scaffolding plank! We were beside ourselves with laughter and spread the news among the other workers that day, each interaction stoking his ever-burning legendary reputation. 15 minutes later... Jeff rolls in with another bail of insulation strapped to his back. This became a familiar and ever-comforting sight to see Jeff strolling in along the trail by the lake.

He described how he was feeling a little “weak and lazy” after his first delivery at 3:00 a.m. so he took “a nap” in his vehicle. We chuckled at his obnoxious intensity and provided him with some food. He quickly got down to work though. His main purpose while there at the hut was to discern a delivery disorder that occurred with the steel exterior. Jacob, him, and I spent a few hours scouring the Westform deliveries to determine what was missing. Turns out they overdelivered on one item and under-delivered on another. A rush order would have to be made. Low and behold... another Jeff delivery.

That next week we saw Jeff again arriving at the hut at 11:13 p.m. on a Thursday night carting the reordered steel. They were 10 foot long pieces mounted in a sonotube wooden brace that nested into his hiking backpack. He stuck around for 30 minutes and answered a few pending construction questions and then hiked back and drove back home. Jeff. Legend. What would the club do without you?

## Night Shift At Phelix trail

*Ryan MacDonald*

*August 9th, 2025*

“Ryan, you are supposed to be working in Australia and haunting the Discord at weird hours, WTF?”

**P**lans change! I worked 1180 hours in 90 days straight and needed a break. A few of the alpine huts around here mean a lot to me for various reasons. Watersprite, Sphinx, but none more so than Brian Waddington. Some of my absolute best memories of trips in my twenties are at this hut. I made (and ended) some close friendships there, I put in a lot of workhikes to Phelix over the years, and I really regretted not making the time to go and help with the roof repair in 2023 – despite having the time. So when I decided to come home for a rest this summer, I resolved to actually help out and went up for five days in July. I did what I could to cut lumber and hammer nails with everyone else, and it was a good time! I was a very small part of a very huge undertaking, and I look forward to hearing the stories from folks who dedicated an entire month to this project.

Now, Saturday the 9th of August, I was supposed to be driving out to Skatin for a solo ascent of Mt. Pitt. This itinerary still happened, just not quite as I had planned. On Wednesday, the call had gone out for volunteers to haul roughly 430 lbs of dimensional lumber up to Brian Waddington to replace the deck, which was determined to be too rotten to salvage, but not until after everything had been flown in. I respect that the club is getting kinda bagged after three years of having to bear the cost incurred by a decade of us older members sorta deferring maintenance in favour of thoughts and prayers and slapping another layer of paint on, so I decided I could shift my schedule by a day and do another hauling run.

There was also a lot of food to go up, and most folks couldn't start driving up until late Saturday morning. Figuring the project would be better served by those hands getting there fresh and able to do actual work, I dutifully signed up to haul 122 lbs of the lumber in on Saturday morning. I figured I'd drive up Friday night, sleep at the trailhead, get it done gently on Saturday with plenty of breaks - heck, break it up into two trips even- and then start my own trip on Sunday instead. I walked over to the clubroom for the pre-trip, where I picked up an ancient 70's frame pack, and ate a bowlful of ripe blackberries, walking home through PSP. About halfway back, I started to question how the heck I was going to securely lash an assortment of 3-foot lumber to this thing without a bottom shelf, and figured this would suck but not suck too much.

I'm getting way too old for youthful optimism like that.

Thursday night, Joseph Chiao messaged and asked when I'm going up and if he can get a ride with me, as he's going up all week. I say sure, but I'm going up Friday night, and we probably won't get there till after midnight based on when he can leave. He says that's cool, and he'll probably just hike up in the dark.

I was unaware that Joseph was also hauling lumber, so I figured he'd just run the trail. Oh no. No, sir, on the drive up, I find out he's hauling lumber too. Time to drink a kombucha and be glad I took an old man power nap in the afternoon after waking up at 5 am after just over four hours of sleep - this was going to be a long night.

Leaving Vancouver at 9 pm on Friday, with a brief stop for McGrossness in Pemby, we rolled into the trailhead at 12:30 am. Joseph was keen to get cracking and started strapping his lumber into his pack. This included two ridiculous 8-foot-long 2x6s AND a 2x12, and totaled around 130lbs if the spreadsheet was accurate. I stared longingly at the back seats of my Delica while visions of the next VOCene headline flashed in my head: "Exuberant young exec fatally topples on Phelix trail, while veteran club member snoozed in his van!" Surely it would be negligent to stick to my plan and get a good night's sleep while he went up alone? So I shrugged and started lashing my own assortment onto my pack and then stuck my old MEC klettersack over the 2x12, with my quilt, sleeping pad and drinking cup in it.

Joseph expressed relief that I was coming along, as "hiking alone at night is a real strange liminal state", and I expressed sincere surprise that someone other than myself had correctly used the term "liminal" in conversation with me for the first time in my life. Super cool.

The pack I had grabbed is a simple aluminium frame; no frills and which club legend claims Roland Burton had relieved from a dead guy on Everest in the 1970's and later gave to Cassandra Elphinstone. Now in its twilight years of usefulness, it has primarily hauled firewood and such to the huts. Such legends tend to grow in the telling so if I'm unfairly painting our dear Roland

as a grave robber here I can only blame the gossip train far upstream of me (Roland later clarified he in fact took it off a dead guy on Huascarán). This pack was absolutely never intended for carrying a 122 lb load over extended distances, and the long since departed original owner must have been far stouter of waistline than I, as it was a full size too large. All this made for a somewhat uncomfortable weight distribution, even with the belt cinched as tight as possible. In plain English, it was absolutely ravaging my hips and lumbar.

Load lifters for shoulders would not be invented for another twenty years to my dismay. I tried to fake them with some random straps. Frankly, I have no idea how Joseph's 30+ year old cordura pack held up to the load he carried without just shredding, it beggars all belief.

We left the trailhead at 1am. About thirty minutes in we had our first minor kerfuffle. I'd stopped to try and get the belt tighter and as I was catching up with Joseph I hear this "wauuuugh!" ahead of me. Eventually he comes into view, toppled over forwards and stuck. I'm like "Are you hurt?" and he replies "It's OK I'm just upside down!" and I say something like "Yeah, but did you get hurt on the way to upside down?". He assured me he had not. I staggered past on his left and levered him back up by the tip of the absurdly long plank, realized we were in for a very long night indeed, and we continued onwards.

For three and a half hours.

We stopped to take a break every 250 to 500 m, or whenever a suitable boulder / log appeared. The packs never came off – we didn't trust we'd be able to get them back on. I began to really regret chugging 1.5 L of water at the trailhead instead of bringing it with me – it's the same weight on the knees either way right? There were a few crux locations, I'm sure you can imagine most of them if you've been up the trail, but the hardest were navigating particularly dense low hanging foliage with our absurdly lengthy and top-heavy loads. We kept our spirits up with various upbeat wholesome banter and in my case repeated loud groans as I felt another year of utility grind off my knees, groans to which Joseph would respond, "doing alright back there". At one point, panting and seriously feeling my age, I recall muttering in despair to the darkness and to Joseph's hazy mirage: "I really gotta stop doing dumb sh\*t like this, nobody even cares or thinks it's cool."

Around 2:45 am Joseph spotted a headlamp bobbing down towards us and it turned out to be Jeff. He was returning to his truck to get his tent and sleeping gear and deck hardware after hauling up his own epic load of lumber. "I was being lazy and decided to split my loads", Jeff said as he passed. I fully expected him to lap me before I hit the lake but he did not. My half-century old pack eventually began creaking and clicking ominously, and I worried that at any point one of the lash points would fail, then the suddenly unbalanced load would send me toppling downhill or simply snap my ACL. I started having flashbacks to my Baldwin sled which repeatedly dragged me off those same

switchbacks in the winter of 2017. On the other hand, my crackpot last-minute idea of shoving all the lumber into a double layer of heavy duty superstore grocery bags and then running a single lashing under it somehow worked. It held up without any issues.

Joseph, being over a decade younger and somewhat possessed – the man is truly a mountain machine – slowly pulled away as I took more frequent and longer breaks and increasingly questioned my sanity. At one point he shouted something indistinct and I replied with “Yup yup sounds good” and then realized I had no idea whatsoever he had said. I spent the next long while worried he’d keeled over into a bush again and I’d walked right past him. “Scandal!: veteran club member callously abandons young keener in dark wilderness!”. When I finally crossed the outflow bridge I could see his headlamp far off in the distance already at the hut, so that was a relief even if I wasn’t sure whether it was a hallucination or not.

Around 4:15 am, I rolled into camp, dropped my pack, laid down on one of the benches, and immediately passed out. I’d been awake for almost 23 hours, give or take the 45 minute power nap on Friday. I woke up abruptly three hours later when the sun broke over Cabin Hill and lanced straight into my eyes. Something was softly rattling pots and bins around nearby and I muttered out a bleary “bear???” which caused someone to giggle. While recovering my lashing straps (my climbing anchor cordlettes), I had a brief incoherent conversation with a fellow who I eventually realized was not there to work on the hut. It seems his family had come up blissfully unawares of the construction sans-tents and spent the night wrapped in tyvek scraps to keep the dew off instead. They seemed in good spirits regardless and said they were off to summit Gandalf. I hope he didn’t mistake my sleep-addled total and complete lack of comprehension for rudeness! I had no time to waste, so after a few cups of water/gatorade, some chopped apple courtesy of AJ Dreher (the morning “bear”), a protein bar, and some pleasantries with the awakening crew (finding out my soffit hangers had had to be sawzalled down for the third time to fit properly, carpentry was clearly not my calling in life), I was off again. I was back at my van an hour later, where I ran into old hands Alex Rigby & David Mackenzie strapping most of the remaining lumber to themselves, leaving only two 2x8s for James’ crew (who I soon would very abruptly encounter around a corner, halfway down the road to the winter lot).

I was in Mt. Currie by 11 am, discovered that I’d fully blown out both a front and rear suspension strut honing it either up or down the Phelix FSR, tossed back another Kombucha as I drove down the In-SHUCK-ch (it is by Kombucha alone I set myself in motion), and 2 pm saw me parking 4 km up the heavily tank-trapped Chief Paul FSR. I had a long, looooooong bushwack ahead of me to Mt Pitt; my pack weighed just over 44 lbs and managed to feel very light and very heavy simultaneously after the previous night. This left my

legs deeply confused as to how they should feel about their situation. Little did they suspect the whipping in store for them over the next three days.

But that is in another report, much too long for the journal.

Once again I remain incredibly delighted at what this club can achieve through the efforts of its membership. A large number of people have put in a staggering amount of hours this year to get this hut rebuilt, and I hope that their efforts are enjoyed by both the club and the outdoors community in general. It's wonderfully heartwarming to watch, I'm honoured every time I get to participate in projects like this in even a small capacity, but I also really hope we can all do a lot more trips for a few years now and a little less hammering and especially less hauling.

That being said, there is quite a lot of tools and material left to be hauled out of the hut this coming weekend. So if you are feeling inspired after reading this and/or wanting to one-up an old man like me at his own game... The pack is still up there, waiting for a new challenger.

**Left** *Ryan Joseph Chiao* **Right** *Joseph Ryan MacDonald*





Photos  
John Sherk



# The Masters of Steel

*John Sherk*

**I**t was July 2025 up at the Phelix (Brian Waddington) Hut and the wall replacement was well underway. We were upgrading to a wall system that wouldn't leak, that wouldn't compromise its timber frame and that could deal more appropriately with creating a climate barrier for its occupants. To do this properly we had secured the wall system tightly to the timber frame, added a layer of plywood for a consistent screwing surface and covered the plywood with Tyvek. Some of the struggles with prepping the wood frame for the steel was picking a new datum line for the paneling, hang floor divide and the soffit height. The roof of the hut built in summer 2023 is a thing of true perfection, employing exact angles, flawless geometry and impressive strength. In contrast, the timber frame, floor joists and wall framing are prone to inconsistencies and vary from one side to the other. Ryan McDonald and I can attest to how hard it was to know where to hang the height of the new soffit. Ryan pioneered the first wooden mount pieces on the corners of the hut. Frustratingly by the time we were done, each corner frame was nailed up, dismantled and rebuilt two to three times over. Such an agonizing process, but alas, progress is progress. May we never forget that iterative learning will always prevail.

“Neeerrrrroooooonnnnngg!”... The obnoxious noise of the grinder disk on metal became the familiar sound during this final stage of construction. Rarely was the generator not rumbling in the background, and the sawhorse tables and beach area were bursting with light and sparks. During the early stages of the metal wall assembly, Jeff Mottershead had laid a number of panels out by the lake and began the process of trimming them to height. This took a lot of grinding hours, and so good to get out of the way. The back of the hut's panels were the first ones to go up. Jeff ran his crews with great efficiency, recruiting his members in the midst of our busy weekend days and educating them on all the detailed aspects of the processes.

## VOCJ68

There were so many different parts to the exterior assembly. The big panels, the window trims, the inside and outside corners, the starter box, the soffits, the soffit hangers, the bottom wall trim. Keeping these pieces and panels all organized was pretty tough. How many panels do we have again? Is this the correct one? Which direction should this one go? Am I drilling from this side or that side? How many are left? Do we need a recount? It was common to see people visualizing a panel flip with their hands and mentally mounting it to the side of the hut with their own hands. Metal siding work is not a simple trade and not an easy one to do well.

The trim on the seven windows of the hut created a lot of detailed work. I struggled leading or providing advice at this stage because I had never assembled exterior steel window trim before and my only steel panelling experience had been on the Burton Hut roof replacement the prior year. The steel needed to be shaped quite precisely to be effective for redirecting water drainage. I dislike upholding quality management standards for trade work that I can't accomplish myself, but at this stage I found myself at a total moral impasse.

"John, come here, what do you think of this?" "Is this ok"? Joseph Chiao would call from the top of the scaffolding that was extended to the 2nd story's south peak window. It was heartbreaking to climb up to the top of the scaffolding to examine his hard work and tell him... "No, unfortunately, what you just made won't work, because the water will leak in here... and here." I would see his sighs of temporary defeat and disappointment, recognizing that the two hours he just spent cutting that window trim didn't pay off and he would literally have to get an entirely new piece and start anew. Although he groaned in dismay, the rejection of these first few window trims and drip edges fueled his fire to perfect his trade.

Of any of the construction attire used this summer (including cowboy hats taped on top of helmets), Joseph won for the most entertaining and brutally functional clothing assembly. The sparks had melted/burned through a number of his clothes, so he fashioned a partial skirt from thin sheet metal left over from the outhouse and elegantly hung it from his waist with red tuck tape. He wore my oversized tool belt around his waist, hung from the remnants of a glacier kit around his shoulders. It was incredibly hilarious because the whole assembly would rotate around his hips, clanking the metal skirt as he waddled back and forth from one side of the work bench to the other, slotting tools in and out of the belt and examining his work with oversized safety glasses, pushing up on the toque, crammed under his helmet. It was raining, so rather than wreck his Gore-Tex jacket, he was rocking a clear plastic bag cut out at the head and arms. What a hilarious and inspiring sight it was. Truly a very talented, mad scientist hard at work. We chuckled watching him diligently shape the steel. It was not just nerdy and ridiculous but also truly impressive. Joseph

learned the ropes for the window trims with a short demonstration model made by my good friend Jason Galbraith. With a little trial and error, a few rejected models by me, extremely long hours, intelligence, determination and a wackload of cookies and caramel popcorn, Joseph completed all the window trims and drip edges on the rest of the hut. People form their entire careers around these tasks, he learned it within the space of days with us all waiting on him. Kudos to this master of steel.

We were so fortunate to have Chris Snell out at the project during the exterior panelling stage. With considerable experience in architecture and residential construction, he was able to take the lead and troubleshoot methods for assembly. I was so thankful to be able to hand off components to his expertise and leadership. He knew how to make decisions and guide the way. I remember the groans and shouts of temporary defeat or celebration as his assembled team slaved away at the three-dimensional puzzle on the front corners of the hut. Countless hours were spent plotting out the methods, cutting and then attempting to assemble but then realising how impossible our approaches were and returning to the saw horses to grind just a little more metal down.

The three overhanging locations of the hut required mounting a lengthy square trim piece that ran below the length of the roof peak; the infamous starter box. Getting the starter box pieces in the correct location proved to be difficult and time-consuming. We had positioned Elizabeth Chu out at the front to be our eyes, but the difficulties of holding those pieces in place and simultaneously driving nails by hand rarely ended in anything but struggle and defeat. Sunny Das and I likely spent two hours on top of the scaffolding putting up a singular piece of metal. Is it straight? Is it high enough? How is it from your angle? We would mount it, step back, recognize that it was crooked and then have to take it down, redrill it, and nail it back in. The process was truly agonizing. Our positivity and perfectionist attitudes quickly deteriorated into hysterical laughter in the face of repeated technical failures, miscommunication, and sore arms. Slow we may have been, but eventually we gave in to victory. For the rest of our lives, we can now look up at that piece of metal and say that it is in a "perfect" spot just because we put it there.

Aaron Lee was the main man at the task of mounting the steel soffit hang components. These thick pieces extending to the corners below the front alcoves required very technical grinder cuts and precision in mounting heights. Between assembling the panelling, cutting the soffit trim pieces and prepping all of our cut-offs for the hike down and dump disposal, Aaron did A LOT of grinder work. I recall hiking to the hut at 9 pm after returning from a run in Vancouver. From a distance, I could see the sparks of the grinder cutting through the drizzling rain on the other side of the lake. Aaron had been diligently working at cutting steel all day long.

Although we were careful about being equipped with safety glass-

es, we did have an incident that occurred sometime during the steel cutting: Aaron was experiencing some discomfort in one of his eyes, presumably from a shaving or dust particle. He left the site to get it examined and flushed out in Squamish. After the issue was resolved on the next day, he didn't waste a single second and was able to promptly return.

I joined the efforts of Joseph and Aaron for the final right side peak wall and the panelling on the front entrance. It was a grueling three-dimensional puzzle, full of an infinite number of scaffolding climbs, tests of patience, and annoying black bugs with long antennas. It was an honor to be involved in the installation of the final siding piece on the front entry. With such satisfaction, we inscribed a few final comments on the back side of the last piece of metal. Victory! Well sort of... the exterior walls were fully back together but there was a multitude of project work and cleanup that had to be wrapped up both in the hut and around the site. We had accomplished so much already, so the many pending to-dos would be accomplished in the many weeks to come.

When these volunteers weren't slaving over the steel construction, they were keeping sane with cookies and popcorn, comedic and bizarre cooking adventures, and hidden behind the steel felt-marker graffiti. With a vibrant energy matching the explorations of the "Tuna-Oat-orade" at the Burton Hut roof replacement, Joseph and Chris shot the first episode of their cooking show where they tested out "Tuna-Dill-Oats avec Dijon! Their smiles were ever-wide as their explorations coated our hut countertops with a criminal aroma. Our patience for the infamously frustrating waterproofing adhesive called "butyl tape" waned significantly. In an act of great wit, Elizabeth returned us to appreciating its presence by starting a "How do you spell Butyl tape?" anti-spelling bee on the north side of the hut. Its diversity in expression kept me entertained. In the midst of our tiring construction schedule, I believe it was these bizarre laughter-filled memories that were the glue to our community and the source of individual sanity. So to all you volunteers that kept us grounded as we solved our chaos, laughing in the sight of flaw and hopeful amidst possible despair, we say a great thank you.

Next time you visit the Brian Waddington Hut, I encourage you to pause, look up to this metal-clad beautiful building, pick out one component you admire (or don't), and ask yourself, how exactly did it get there? If you know, pat yourself on the back, for you were there. If you don't know, find someone who does and sincerely thank them, for it is their mastery of craft and dedication that allows us to continue doing the things we do.

# Beans, Rice, and Strawberry-Rhubarb: A Phelix Walls/Hauling Trip

*Ewan Raven Butterfield*

*August 23rd - August 28th 2025*

*Brian Waddington Hut*

*Participants: Ewan Raven Butterfield, Celine Cullen, Sunny Das, Kat Griffin, Imogen Hayes, Sean McKay, Jeff Mottershead, John Sherk.*

## **Prelude**

After hearing about the Phelix roof project in 2023 and being too busy to help out with the Sphinx rebuild project in the Autumn of 2024, I was determined to help with the Phelix walls replacement project. I had marked myself as available for three different weekends during the build, expecting to go on at least two of these and planning to take a day or two off work to help out. I was all set to go up with Maiya Callister's team in early July when I did a silly. I managed to concuss myself by walking into a wall at work while trying to recycle something. How? I'll leave that to your imagination but I assure you it was entirely stupid and my own fault. And with that I was out for several more weeks and expected that I wouldn't have the chance to contribute to the project at all.

This was very emblematic of my time in the VOC so far – staring at the trip agenda enviously while various things kept me in the city and away from the mountains.

I would get to contribute to this project however, as a three week build slowly became four, then five weeks, with special mention to John Sherk and Aaron Lee who stayed at the hut for a month. And so, when Anton Afanassiev sent out the call to action in late August, I jumped at the chance to lead a trip up there.



**Left** Jeff mid-scaffolding haul. *Sean McKay*  
**Above** The Shelf Fully Set Up. *Sean McKay*

## Part One: Scope Creep and Scaffolding

**J**ohn, Sean McKay and Kat Griffin went up to the hut on Friday to begin work. Sean and Kat had the main goal of hauling up and installing the gorgeous shelf that Sean made.

The rest of us would get a 5:30 a.m. start in Vancouver on Saturday morning. Unfortunately, we lost one soldier at minute zero when Elizabeth Chu slept through her alarm and the combined seven calls from Sunny Das and Jeff Mottershed. Once we got to the hut Jeff immediately started on his solitary mission for the weekend – hauling down all of the rental scaffolding entirely on his own. Here's what his setup looked like for most of his trips:

In the meantime, John put the rest of us to work on various tasks. Jeff postulated that some of this was John falling victim to 'scope creep'. Sunny worked hard on the wainscoting and trim; Imogen Hayes took over sanding and painting blemishes on the interior walls. Celine Cullen became the master of crafting and painting the external corner pieces, and I disassembled the quadrapod, rewired the electrical system and spent far too long hiding the wiring. At the end of day one Sunny departed with Sean and Kat. I spent the evening crafting a meal for anyone inclined to my cooking, which was a spicy beans rice bowl made from the available food at the hut. I got moderately positive reviews which is always nice to hear as a cook.

The next day we would spend more time on various tasks that are now lost to my brain, but seemed never ending at the time. Jeff continued hauling scaffolding. Sometime around 5:00 p.m. Jeff, Celine, Imogen and I left the hut to go down to the car and back to Vancouver. John insisted on staying 'a little longer'. In the car, we discussed when we thought John would finally leave the hut, to which I mused that it would probably take darkness falling to get him to finally stop working and leave. I would later find out that he left the hut at 8:30 p.m.

When we left on Sunday, the hut was almost finished, with everything done except for the window trim on four windows, one Jeff-sized haul of scaffolding, some cleanup, and a lot of garbage hauling.

Jeff returned the next day after work and completed the remaining scaffolding hauling before sunrise.

### **Part Two: Strawberry-Rhubarb**

Ignatius had planned a trip for Tuesday-Thursday to continue work at the hut (mostly hauling). I had two days left of work before the end my co-op term, so I asked if we could leave Tuesday after my work. Thus, I showed up to my last day at work with full overnight gear, hopefully showing them that I was making the most of my vacation and not that I was eager to get out of there. When Ignatius Zhou and Elizabeth Chu came by to pick me up, I was surprised to find Aaron Lee had joined the trip, apparently having not had enough with his monthlong stint at the hut.

We made our way up to the trailhead, but first took a pitstop at a gas station in Pemberton to fill up with gas and have a Strawberry-Rhubarb pie that Ignatius brought. It was at this point that Aaron suggested we heat the pie on the engine block. We didn't have the patience



*Top to bottom*

**1** Elizabeth grabbing strawberry-rhubarb pie from the engine block.

*Raven Butterfield*

**2** Raven's Pack *Elizabeth Chu*

**3** Aaron with the generator

*Raven Butterfield*

to wait long enough for it to actually heat up, but I maintain that if we waited a little longer, eventually the pie would have been warm. Either way, the pie tasted fantastic .

We made it up the summer lot in the dark and set up camp for the night. The following morning our hauling saga began and the four of us began up the trail to Phelix. But while Elizabeth, Ignatius and I were content to enjoy our temporary freedom of having no weight on our backs, Aaron for reasons best known only to himself decided to haul a full load of firewood up to the hut. At the hut Elizabeth set to cutting dimensional lumber into plywood while I loaded up an obnoxiously large pack to haul down to the lot.

With our heavy packs Ignatius, Aaron and I set off down the mountain with no idea that we would lose a soldier to a sprained ankle on this haul. Aaron shot off at lightning speed leaving Ignatius and I in the dust. We toiled our way down the mountain and just over halfway down Ignatius offered to trade packs as mine was considerably heavier and he was up for a turn. The rest of the trail fell before our feet without issue until the very end.

Right as we approached the sight of the car encouraged me and gave me a burst of energy. I passed Ignatius, determined to get the car and shed my pack. Just as I was crossing the final creek, I heard a yelp from behind me. It turns out with just 50 meters to go Ignatius's shoe came untied and with a heavy pack that's a pain to put on he decided to just keep going. Unfortunately, not six steps later something went wrong and he sprained his ankle, taking him out of our hauling team for the rest of the trip. I was in fine condition however so I returned up the mountain to a lovely lunch that Elizabeth had prepared. The main course was a very similar spicy beans and rice to what I had made on the weekend. The best part however was the bannock that Elizabeth made, we ate it with some Strawberry-Rhubarb jam we found in the food bins.

The rest of the day was tiring but uneventful as Aaron, Elizabeth and I continued hauling, eventually finishing our final descent on Wednesday in the dark and turning in for the night.

I did manage to get some nice photos of the lake though.

Thursday was also relatively uneventful, with the three of us returning to the hut to clean up, document our progress, tarp the remaining plywood and sheet metal, as well as haul some tools down. I painfully discovered that the shoulder straps on the frame pack I was using were put on backwards, so the frame pack was fiercely digging into my spine. After a quick pit stop myself and Aaron managed to fix the frame pack to be the right way around and we continued our descent down to the bottom. Shout out to Aaron for carrying the heavy generator that was still mostly full of fuel.

As we packed up, we realized we needed one more garbage car trip to the winter lot dumpster before we could all fit in the car. So, Ignatius set off in the car, telling us it could be an hour until he was back. The rest of us settled in



for a wait and were surprised when Ignatius returned a mere 25 or so minutes later. After we all loaded into the car, said our goodbyes to Phelix and set off down the FSR we learned how he'd done it so fast. Ignatius took the FSR at some speed, but with confidence and skill. Still, that didn't stop me from feeling a bit like Ralph from the Simpsons. “\*chuckles\* I'm in danger.”

And with that my trips to Phelix were done for now. I had one day in the city before I turned around to go hiking to Seagram Lake for the Labour Day long weekend. This would put me at 3 camping trips to make 7 out of 10 consecutive days camping. I was (and still am) trying to make up for two years of VOC FOMO.

**Photo** Phelix Lovely Lower Lake. *Raven Butterfield*

## Sheet Metal is Very Light and Easy to Carry Down the Phelix Trail

*AC Muller*

*October 17th-19th*

*Participants: Hannah Saarimaki, John Sherk, Tom Koenig, Iris Kaufman, AC Muller*

“Sheet metal is very light and easy to carry down the Phelix trail”. That was the lie we kept telling ourselves throughout this entire trip.

The preface was simple: VOC hut constructions tend to need about twice as many trips hauling trash down as we think and plan for. It was no different after the wall replacement for Phelix, with the added bonus of a lot of leftover stuff from the roof construction in 2023. Several hauling trips had already been organised, but by October it was clear that another would be needed. And so, at around 7 pm on a Friday, John Sherk picked up Hannah Saarimaki, Iris Kaufman, Tom Koenig and me to set out on a wild adventure. We stopped at Wendy’s on the way and watched John order a few salads: “I didn’t have time to pack any food, so these will be my meals”.

It was almost midnight by the time we reached Pemberton. While driving up the FSR, the big discussion began: would we camp at the trailhead, or should we resist the tiredness and hike up the trail in the middle of the night? Ultimately, we made the incredibly logical decision to hike up, seeing as we were too lazy to set up our tents. Makes sense, I know. Funnily enough, it wound up taking John an entire hour to get organised, so we didn’t start the hike until 1:20 am. Much to our excitement, we discovered that the mud on the trail had frozen solid, which made the hike up a lot easier and less dangerous. Fast forward to 3 am, and we finally reached the hut. Oh, what a sight! This was not my first time hiking up to Phelix after midnight during a workhike, and the feeling of reaching the final destination in the cover of darkness will never



**Above** And we're off. *Tom Koenig*  
**Left** Snowy Shadowfax. *Tom Koenig*

be matched. Hannah graciously started a fire, so that by 4 am, we were able to catch up on much-needed sleep in a warm hut.

Sometime in the morning, we began hustling and bustling to sort through all of the, excuse my language, crap up there. Not only did we find tons of construction waste, but also a lot of food and other unidentifiable items. Meanwhile, it had started snowing quite heavily outside – we believe this was the first time the new walls were exposed to snow! We started preparing our packs for the way down, deciding that Iris, Hannah and Tom would fill up their own packs with garbage, while John and I would use framepacks to lug down large pieces of sheet metal. Now, the thing about sheet metal is that it's very thin and overall looks quite unimpressive. Until you pick it up. My god those things were heavy. We started by taping together three pieces and attaching them to the framepack. I tested it, and confidently said, "Oh this is no problem! I can take more!" My reasoning was that taking more would mean we would only have to complete one singular trip that day, and could just leave the rest for tomorrow. So, we added two additional sheets to my pack. After spending another half hour preparing John's framepack, we finally got ready for the way down. Shortly before 2 pm, we finally started trekking through the snow (microspikes were put on immediately). 200 m in, still walking around the lake, I already noticed that I had potentially taken on a bit too much. But I knew I'd be disappointed in myself if I gave up so early. Shortly after John snapped a shot of me displaying high levels of desperation, I suddenly heard fabric ripping. Lo and behold, I realised it was the hip strap, forcing all of the weight onto my shoulder instead (which was injured, btw). While the other three were much faster, John kindly stayed with me, constantly chuckling at how insane this entire situation was.



**Left** The Face of Regret *John Sherk* **Right** Snow for Phelix' New Walls *AC Muller*

Once the steep sections began, I came to notice that another piece of my gear was not functioning as well as I had hoped: the sticky snow kept clumping together under my spikes, causing me to roll my ankles pretty much every five metres. I'm pretty sure I've never sworn that much in such a short timespan in my entire life. I was incredibly grateful to be hiking with John, who tends to just laugh at everything, which gave me much-needed serotonin. Meanwhile, we realised that carrying sheet metal has one large downside: it's unfeasible to sit down for a bit to take a break, as getting back up would be close to impossible.

As I suffered while slipping and sliding down the steepest sections of the trail, I kept thinking: "What the hell am I doing here? I could be at home in my bed doing nothing right now." But those feelings were overpowered by the reminder that I love being outside more than anything else, even if it's in the shape of type II fun. We met the others at the halfway point, who were luckily all still feeling quite energetic. Tom seemed very keen to take over John's pack, while Hannah offered to switch with mine. At first, I did not want to agree to that. I didn't want to give up. But John was smarter and accepted Tom's offer, which then showed me: it's actually not giving up. It's sharing the load as a team, helping each other out and conserving overall energy. So, I agreed and switched with Hannah. And oh what a difference it made – while Hannah's pack was also heavy, it at least had a functioning hip strap and did not throw off my balance quite as much. The rest of the hike down went smoothly, except for when Tom was stuck on his back like a bug. Reaching the cars felt liberating, and realising we'd be hiking back up with empty packs even more so. The trip back up felt incredibly easy after what came before, despite the snow falling heavily. Reaching the hut again in the dark, we happily devoured our meals (or, in John's case, his salad) and warmed up by the fire.

The next morning, we left the hut bright and early at 8.30 am. While

poor John had to carry down another set of sheet metal, I was grateful not to have to go through a repeat performance of the day before. We all stuffed some last remaining pieces of trash into our packs, strapped John's regular pack to the back of mine (since he was still using a framepack), and headed back down the snowy trail. Sunday felt much easier compared to the day before, and we swiftly reached John's truck. While spending about an hour sorting the garbage into the dump in Whistler, we marvelled at how much we had carried down. Seeing it all bundled together definitely put things into perspective.

To quote Tom: "This was so enjoyable, so relaxing! We should do this more often". I agree. Mainly to reclaim my title as Local Legend of the Phelix Trail on Strava. No, but in all seriousness, this trip was the perfect mix of type II and type I fun. Phelix is my favourite place in the world, and these circumstances did not change that fact. I'd rather spend my weekends swearing while hauling sheetmetal down a mountain than staying inside. Sometimes I need to take a second and realise how incredibly unique this university experience is. Only a fraction of people in the world can say that they go backpacking right after walking out of a lecture, let alone helping out with a construction project of a hut their student club owns. It's a wild life, and I am lucky to be living it. Thank you, John, Hannah, Tom, and Iris, for being a fantastic crew to suffer with.

**Photo** One More Group Selfie, Everyone! *John Sherk*



## **VOC Celebrates Volunteers Who took Part in Extensive Backcountry Hut Renovation Northeast of Pemberton**

*Hillary Angus*

*This Article was originally published in Pique Newsmagazine on January 15, 2026*

Visitors to the Brian Waddington Memorial Hut will sleep more comfortably this winter thanks to an extensive summer renovation project one organizer called a “monumental achievement for everybody.”

A team of 77 volunteers from UBC and the wider community spent 5,340 hours on the hut renovation project this past summer, which included a full replacement of the walls with significant upgrades to the building envelope and vapour barrier.

The student-run UBC Varsity Outdoors Club (VOC) first learned the 27-year-old hut was in need of repairs when part of its roof detached from the structure in the spring of 2023. Once the roof was off for replacement, more issues were discovered.

“It became clear that we would have to do a follow-up project of equal magnitude,” said Adam Steele, a UBC student and VOC executive.

The Waddington Hut is one of four backcountry huts the VOC owns in the Sea to Sky corridor, which are accessible to the general public with a \$15 per night donation. While reliable numbers are hard to come by since they don’t require registration, Steele estimates several thousand people use the huts each year.

The 2025 wall renovation was the VOC’s third significant project in recent years, following a 2023 roof replacement and an overhaul of the Roland Burton

Hut on Garibaldi Lake in 2024.

Backcountry renovation comes with a host of challenges that make it much more complex than your typical renovation project, Steele said.

This year's three-week, on-the-ground project required months of pre-planning, such as fine-tuned construction plans and coordinating helicopter drops for building materials, tools, and food.

The hut is located northeast of Pemberton on Long Lake, close to Birkenhead Lake Provincial Park. In summer, it's accessed by a 5.5-kilometre (2.5-hour) hike in from the nearest parking location, which itself is about an hour's drive from Pemberton.

"You can't just run out and grab a box of nails," Steele said.

Once the work was complete, crew members spent weeks hiking materials out of the site and generally readying the hut for winter.

In addition to logistics, Steele and other members of the VOC executive—who themselves are volunteers—spent months recruiting volunteer labourers from UBC and the wider community, who Steele said came with varying degrees of construction and backcountry experience.

"We try to incorporate people meaningfully as best as we can, there's always a job for somebody," he said, noting work rosters were designed in advance so people with more advanced construction skills would always be on site with others who may be learning to use tools for the first time.

Steele said projects like this demonstrate what's possible when the community shares a commitment to outdoor recreation.

"The VOC runs on, you know, ordinary people doing ordinary things, but a lot of them believing in the same thing, which is outdoor recreation," he said. "It is a labour of love, but it also is a lot of work."

Steele said the VOC was incredibly grateful to have raised nearly \$40,000 for the 2025 renovation from a variety of sources, including the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC), the BC Mountain Foundation (BCMF), the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District and the Alpine Club of Canada.

Louise Pedersen, executive director of the ORCBC, said there is a common

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misconception that outdoor recreation infrastructure is primarily maintained by the government, when in reality much of the work is led by volunteers and community-based organizations.

“Across British Columbia, thousands of volunteers contribute countless hours to maintaining outdoor recreation amenities. These efforts are often supported by small grants or partnerships, but the backbone is community commitment,” Pedersen said in an email.

The ORCBC maintains the Outdoor Recreation Fund of BC, which was established in 2023 with a \$10-million grant from the provincial government to



support community recreation groups. Community groups can receive up to \$10,000 for recreation-related projects.

“Recognizing and investing in these volunteers, and making it easier for them to access funding is essential if we want our recreation infrastructure to keep pace with growing demand,” Pedersen said.

Applications for this year’s funding round are open until Jan. 20, and anyone wishing to contribute to the fund is welcome to do so.

**Photo** *Ryan MacDonald*





PETZL

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TROUSSE À OUTILS

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MILK CHOCOLATE - CHOCOLAT AU LAIT

OF UNITED KINGDOM

PRODUCE OF SWITZERLAND

# HIKING AND SCRAMBLES



## A quick walk through my mind (and around the Garibaldi Lake)

*Joseph Chiao*

*July 24, 2025*

*Garibaldi Lake*

*Participants: Joseph Chiao*

“To every man upon this earth  
Death cometh soon or late.  
And how can man die better  
Than facing fearful odds,  
For the ashes of his fathers,  
And the temples of his Gods.”

**T**his famous quote from the Lays of Ancient Rome kept repeating itself in my head as I strode through the mindless descent from Panorama Ridge. How can man die better? But better yet, how can man live better? Or perhaps the same questions are being asked here.

Anyway, this is supposed to be a trip report about my solo day trip circumnavigating Garibaldi Lake. The trip itself honestly felt a little dull. Perhaps this is the result of intense dialogue occupying my focus away from the surrounding beauty. I did this trip solo, partially because I didn't want to deal with the fuff of having other people, given the length of this day. However, the real reason was for me to spend a day by myself, in the mountains, isolated. I didn't know what to expect; I thought I might be afraid, relaxed, inspired, or discover some entirely new emotions within myself. One thing I knew for sure was that I absolutely needed this experience at some point, and I was right. Given that the traverse itself doesn't deserve much attention, I shall intertwine this trip report

**Photo** John's toolbox *Sri Chaitanya*

**Section cover** *Tra Mi Do Le*

with the journey that went on within my mind.

### **Escape from the Civilized World**

As all single-day epics are, I woke up at 3:00 am after a short but possibly functional 2.5 hours of sleep. Driving down the roads in the early morning is an interesting experience, as the usually busy highway lies empty through a quiet city. The open road unfortunately meant I drove a little faster than usual, and there was no one speeding ahead to attract the police. Getting pulled over and handed a ticket was just what I needed to start my day. Despite the penalty, this little hiccup didn't ruin my mood whatsoever. I continued towards the Rubble Creek parking lot, now under the speed limit, of course.

There isn't much to be said about the switchback up, other than the fact that I tried to complete it as fast as possible. My previous two visits to Garibaldi Park (The Neve Disasterclass, and the Sphinx white gas and bleach and beer resupply) were both done at night. Doing this trail solo in the dark provides me with nothing but a liminal feeling of uneasiness and boredom. Luckily for me, the perception of time felt particularly messed up today, and I arrived at the Barrier Lake in no time, as the sky began to light up. I walked through the Garibaldi Lake campground some hour and a half after I set off, greeting the last few humans that I would see for the next little while. I then started heading up Mount Price.

The trail up Price sucked. I kept thinking that I would like to come back here and fix this trail up. The VOC currently maintains three trails though, and two of them could use some more love, so I guess I'd better not spread myself too thin just yet. After a small amount of bushwhacking, deadfall hopping, and almost twisting my ankle (my closest call of the day), I exited the tree line to start the scree climb. Hiking up loose scree was just as charming as always; three steps forwards two steps back. Nevertheless, I made it to the top of Price before 9:00 am, well within my schedule.

### **Popularization of Outdoor Recreation**

I am of the opinion that engagement with the wilderness positively influences an individual. As they experience the beauty of the backcountry, they inherently gain an appreciation for the land upon which they travel and occupy. An intrinsic need to protect and preserve, then develop, without any external influence or motivation. So, it follows that we should try to get as many people into the backcountry as possible. Right?

As I walked through the Garibaldi Lake campground, something hit me. This place didn't feel natural at all. It has been annexed from the surrounding environment, overrun with people and facilities. When people come to the lake and spend a night at the campsite, it's almost like they never left the city at all. Sure, there's a lake and mountains around, but there's a clear disconnect

between the individual and the beauty they observe.

So, it is here where I ran into this paradox: is the popularization of outdoor recreation eventually self-defeating? We bring more people outdoors to help them discover and appreciate the land. But during this process, we inevitably destroy the very environment that we wish to experience and protect. We can't expect everyone to find their own remote corner of the wilderness to explore. Not everyone has the kind of experience, resources, or motivation necessary. So then what exactly is the right thing to do?

### **Into the Wilderness**

The top of Price offered a panoramic view. To the south, Mount Garibaldi stands proud, with its entire approach route visible. To the north, The Black Tusk protrudes from the low early morning clouds. The green marshes around the lake looked like something out of a fairy tale. I didn't linger at the summit, though. Instead, I took some mental notes of my route for the day, and after a quick bite, marched off-trail to start the wilderness part of this trip.

Having done the Clarke-Outrigger traverse earlier in the month, the bushwhack down Price appeared comparatively comfortable. I picked the smoothest looking gully and just went for it. I moved fast through the descent, and my environment quickly changed from the dry rocky alpine to a wet marshy grassland infested with mosquitoes. The ground acted like a sponge soaked with water, and my trail runners quickly became waterlogged. Having brought no replacement socks, the best I could manage was to wring them out occasionally. Unwilling to slow down, I just lived with the discomfort. This part of the trip was relatively flat, so navigation was easy. I pointed myself to the northeastern edge of The Table, and straight-lined my way there. The Table really is a weird terrain feature. Besides the near-vertical faces on each of its sides, it also has this arch structure towards its west. This puzzled me as I struggled to understand how the brittle volcanic rock could support the overhang.

After reaching the ridgeline on the east side of The Table, the view opened up again. This is one of my favourite parts of the traverse, with easy walking through the short trees and bushes on this delightful alpine flat. It didn't last, though, as I soon started my descent towards Sentinel Bay. Going through some loose scree and snowfields, I made quick work of this section. The choice of trail runners suffered slightly in this section, as my attempt at glissading was really more of a "controlled falling".

After hopping over a few streams, I arrived at the two glaciology huts. Their deteriorating state made me grateful for how luxurious the VOC huts are in comparison. After a quick snack break, I hit the road again, this time aiming for the Guard-Deception col some 500 m above my current location. Between me and up the slope was a decently sized stream, one I could not confidently

jump over. So, I followed it up for a couple hundred meters in search of a better crossing point, as I didn't want to waste time taking my shoes off. The small detour led me to a few large boulders that seemed stable enough for me to hop over. I was wrong. My laziness punished me with a totally soaked left foot, and the time spent taking my shoes off to wring off the socks defeated the whole purpose of saving time anyway.

The ascent up to the col was steep. The ground beneath was a little too loose to support my weight, and the patches of snow were a little too hard for me to step on. I experimented with using pointy rocks as ice axes but had very limited success. Despite the annoyance, the terrain wasn't impassable, so slowly I made my way up, and the gradient became more friendly as I approached my next waypoint.

The col is essentially my halfway mark, and it was exactly noon when I arrived. By my prediction, I would get down by 5:00 pm if I just kept going. This was my day with the mountains, and I had no intention of going home early. So, I decided to tag Deception Peak as an impromptu side quest.

### **Seeing Life Through Death**

We live our lives in relative terms. The fire feels warmer when the weather is cold, and the food tastes more delicious when you're hungry. The last (and only) time I was on the verge of death, my privilege of living suddenly became apparent. As an individual with many existential crises, I've long pondered the ultimate purpose of life (among other things). But what I've taken for granted in those inquiries was the axiom: being alive. Through my experience from last year, I've realized that life has no meaning if death isn't put into perspective. I realized that the closer I am to death, the more alive I feel. So, my goal here on Deception was to find that inspiration again, hopefully through less extreme means than last time.

What I did here was perhaps irresponsible, but it was deliberate. I did not go for the usual beta of tracking low and cutting up from the south. Instead, I went straight up looking for a more exposed and difficult scramble. Of course, I was being extremely careful, checking each rock extensively before using it. I also implemented a policy of not looking at the time to avoid rushing myself. After all, I knew I wouldn't be able to figure out these questions about life if I lost my own.

The focus in those moments is something that I treasure. The world becomes so incredibly simple when the only thing you think about is the tiny hand crimp that is keeping you alive. Those who know me well have heard me talk about the voices in my head that distract me from my work. In these moments, the voices cease. All I felt was a strange duality of peace and terror. Nothing was being questioned, and nothing was being formulated. The moment had my total and undivided attention.

After traversing a few false summits, I arrived at Deception Peak. The top of the peak was a flake of rock, and I clamped it with my legs to secure myself on the apex. Reaching this summit was rather anti-climactic for some reason. The moment itself felt unextraordinary. That is, until I looked around me.

### Who am I, but a Speck of Dust?

Looking around at the peaks and glaciers, their scale becomes incomprehensible. A man becomes a dot when standing underneath the giants that have been lifted out of the Earth. Ice that is strong enough to carve out entire valleys remains frozen in time from the human perspective. This is to say, the degree of space and time in which the land operates is something completely beyond human comprehension. Individuals become insignificant in the context of this omnipotent masterpiece on which we walk, and our various skirmishes become laughably petty.

In short, I feel humbled by what surrounds me. One tends to forget this when they become detached from nature. Sitting in a room, the walls were built by people, the phone you are holding was created by people, and whatever content you are consuming on said phone is created by people. Everything in this environment is under control, either by the individual themselves or a member of their species. This quickly entrenches them in a mindset of arrogance, as they can literally dictate the physical space in which they occupy.

As I stood atop Deception Peak, I felt absolutely powerless. I was invisible in the vastness of this landscape. Furthermore, the slightest miscalculation in where I stood could have ended my life in an instant—the mountains grant no sympathy for my existence. I had no say in the way things work around me; I was in full submission to the land. Whatever importance I thought I had to the world was irrelevant, because the reality here is that the mountains do not discriminate. We are all but a speck of dust.

When one becomes submissive to their environment, to nature, one starts to realize how foolish it is to challenge its course. Who are we to decide

**Left** Top of Price **Right** Just before descending into Sentinel Bay. *Joseph Chiao*



we can drain the land of its resources, to alter its shape, and for it not to hit back? There's no need for me to explain the significance of environmental impact here, and if you've made it this far, then you probably agree with what I have to say. This mindset of dominance becomes impossible once you've learned your place in the land. I don't think any oil executive started their career by looking at a glacier and thinking, "hmm wouldn't it be neat if I could destroy this one day." If more people can experience this sense of humility, to see the power that lies behind the land, I believe this world would be a much better place.

### **Alone in the Universe**

I took the normal beta down Deception. It honestly wasn't that much easier, but certainly less exposed. Having not checked my phone at all, I was slightly surprised when I found out this side quest took me two hours to complete. Not a big deal though, I was still within my schedule for the day. On the way down to Sphinx Bay, I stayed close to the west side to avoid getting onto the Guard Glacier. The mix of packed snow and scree made for quick traveling, but also quick deterioration in my knees.

This part was, once again, a bit boring. But then I realized something: since when would a trip like this be boring to me? Everyone who has ever hiked with me knows how psyched I get about everything when I'm in the mountains, but there was just none of that. The view certainly wasn't any worse than usual, and I wasn't in a bad mood either. I felt somewhat empty—there was no joy, no annoyance, no pain. There were no emotions at all. Then, I started questioning: what's the point? If I don't feel anything on a trip, then what exactly did I achieve other than travel on some arbitrary lines drawn on a map? All that I did could basically be simplified down to me putting one foot in front of another, so then what difference is that from me walking down the road, or on a treadmill?

The most obvious cause of my lack of feelings was the fact that I had no one around me. But why do I need someone around me to feel? After all, it is the landscape that puts me in awe, not the people. But if I need others around me to feel, then are my emotions still authentically mine? Or are they just a reflection of those who are around me? I don't know the answer to these questions, and maybe I never will. But then perhaps these answers aren't as important as what I've learned about myself.

### **Relentless**

I reached Burton Hut just after 3:00 pm, where I took a slightly longer break. I was able to find some white gas canisters and hand warmers that I hauled up last October, which felt almost nostalgic as I hadn't seen them since the previous fall, when they were left on the opposite shore of the lake

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for pick up. Having ticked off my last hut (and outhouse) on the VOC huts list, I got going again. I picked a very good line bushwhacking up from the bay and arrived at the SW side of Gentian Pass in no time at all. With Gentian Peak right in front of me, I decided that I would just straight-line up this mountain, instead of trying to intercept the trail that takes me up to the Gentian-Fuscian col. So up I went, and after a bit of steep scree, I made it to the peak. Panorama Ridge now looks tantalizingly close, and once there, it's just switchbacks all the way down. The trek between the two summits was straightforward; part of it even had tracks to follow. However, the fatigue quickly set in as I began my last ascent for the day. The last 200 m of gain up Panorama ridge was possibly the most grueling of the entire trip, but that just means the arrival at the summit pile meant that much more.

Relieved at the fact that I had no more elevation to gain, I made sure to soak up the moment and enjoy this famous BC landmark. Having just gone around most of Garibaldi Lake, the view offered by Panorama Ridge was honestly a little underwhelming. Seeing two silhouettes of backpackers, I decided that I must get a photo at this location to compete with everyone else's profile pictures. As I waited for them to approach, they curiously stayed a couple of hundred meters away from the summit. Not wanting to wait for the next group to arrive, I ran towards them down the hill.

"Joseph?"—shouted one of the silhouettes. Given that I wasn't seeing very straight at this point with my dry contacts, it took me a second to realize who the two people were. It turned out Noah Wyse and Lauren Hope were also doing the same loop around the lake, just in the opposite direction. And who better to meet than two VOCers as my first contact with civilization since this morning? After taking a few photos and exchanging beta, we headed opposite ways. Noah and Lauren still have a few days ahead of them, whereas I am only a few hours away from my car. I started running down from the ridge, passing many people on the way. The trail back to the parking lot was once again quite dull, but then came the thought: how can man live better?

How can man live better?

"To every man upon this earth

Death cometh soon or late.

And how can man die better

Than facing fearful odds,

For the ashes of his fathers,

And the temples of his Gods."

These lines kept circulating through my thoughts as I marched down the trail. I'm not sure why exactly, but it got me thinking. Have I lived better today? The achievements of summiting new mountains felt empty to me, and

there was no sense of gratification to my adventure. So, then what exactly have I done? What did I do today to make myself a better person, or the world a better place? I pondered this as I walked through the flowers of Taylor Meadows. I tried running for a bit, but the length of this epic day was starting to be felt in my legs. As I descended through the switchback, the trees stole the sky, and the light escaped. I made one last turn on the trail just as the last glimmer of light died, but I still haven't arrived at a conclusion. There I was, standing in front of my car, somewhat impressed, but mostly confused. Never have I ended an adventure by thinking "what was the point of that?"

There is no takeaway from this, nor any advice or conclusion. This trip report will end exactly how the trip ended for me: an epic journey, with lots of questions left unanswered.



### **Left to right & top to bottom**

**1** First time at Panorama Ridge.

**2** Now at the Burton Hut.

**3** The Scramble.

**4** Top of Deception.

*Joseph Chiao*

## Life Could be a Dream: Scrambling up the West Lion

*Sunny Das*

*September 8, 2024*

*West Lion, Ch'ich'iyúy Elxwíkn (Two Sisters), North Shore Mountains*  
*Participants: **Joseph Chiao, Sonali Das, Sujin Jung, Cameron Varcoe, Taha Syed, Rowan Clark, Andrew Carriere, Robyn Mueller, Stella Mueller, Harrison Wong, Mitchell Seymour, Tristram St John Cooper**, Daniel Dobjeviche, Ahilan Hatti, Hannah Fok, Shraavan Kumar, Juuso Laajalehto, Eppu Honkanen, Luis Dias, Franky Zhou, Fikri Ajiwijaya, Nicholas Winston Ong* \*\*Summit group marked in bold

As someone who has been to a climbing gym a whopping three times in my life, I decided to sign up for Joseph Chiao's "Intro to Scrambling" trip (number 4 in his series called "Life Could be a Dream") to see what the outdoors could offer that an indoor climbing gym might not. New to UBC, it would be my first VOC trip, and as such, I was unsure what to expect. Typing this entry out at 12:06 am after an 11-hour hike and climb, with my legs a bit sore and my mind still abuzz, I can say with certainty that I did not expect that. Life might be a dream, but my reality today was better.

Who would want to dream when you can get out of bed at 6 am, hop in a car to the North Shore, and hike through forests and peaks, debate with strangers-made friends about everything under the sun (while baking in the very gruelling, very un-metaphorical, very real sun), and summit a class 4 climb for the first time? I, personally, wouldn't hit snooze twice.

For a play-by-play: we started hiking around 8:30 am, beginning at Cypress Creek Lodge. We spent the first four hours on a fairly easy forested trail that took us to several summits: St. Marks, Unnecessary Mountain, and then the base of the West Lion. The group, at around 20 people, was rather large. Still, we quickly grew jovial and friendly, with the expectation and

summit fever ramping up our urge to hike on and see if we could not see the very best thing this September day had to see (spoiler alert: we saw it). Before the base, one group decided it was best to rest instead of continuing and spent the day soaking up the hills and rays. The rest of us ate lunch at the base and watched as our fearless leader, Joseph, scrambled up the West Lion with just a pair of sneakers. Notably, he had been carrying 5 litres of water on his back the whole day and was routinely showing off his altruistic inclinations and extreme physical capabilities. In the end, three people decided to sit the climb out, but for the rest of us, it was time to go.

The scramble began with a rope leading us down a tricky rock, after which we traversed across a bridge between us and the Lion. As our feet and hands gripped the Lion's edges, many of us, including myself, expressed apprehension and fear. We cracked jokes to hide the pumping adrenaline in our systems. For many, it was our first of any such climb - a true intro to scrambling. Sliding across a portion that was particularly exposed, I tried a myriad of tricks to calm my freaked-out nerves — breathing, laughing, complaining, praying. Soon enough, we all passed that section, and the rest of the scramble up was relatively okay, although slow at times. Reaching the top, we bit into the fruits of our labour. A panoramic view of the mountains, city, and sea greeted us,



#### *Top to bottom*

- 1** This is where we ran out of water... *Sunny Das*
- 2** Joseph, the West Lion peak, and 11 new scramblers *Joseph Chiao*
- 3** The West Lion peak, the Howe Sound, and 11 new scramblers *Joseph Chiao*
- 4** The ants go marching one by one *Joseph Chiao*

and we rejoiced in our accomplishment with a few photos and some congratulations. The descent, while nerve-wracking and slow, went by without a hitch, and we soon rejoined those waiting at the bottom. No longer simple hikers, we were now scramblers. Scramblers who had scrambled the West Lion. Pretty cool if I do say so myself.

The way back was but an epic blur of dehydration and exhaustion. Though Joseph had carried up 5 litres of water, we went through it all by 3:00 pm, and most of us hiked the whole way back either slightly or desperately parched. We slogged through the steps, at some points ceasing to talk to conserve those precious H<sub>2</sub>O molecules. But upon reaching the lodge and feeling the taste of the water once more, it was hard not to feel a certain contentment that one can only find after spending a day in the mountains. In total, we walked 20 km and made about 1400 m of elevation gain, including the West Lion.

Takeaway number one: bring more water, drink more water. Takeaway number two: “When you’re in the mountains, life is always a dream.” — Joseph Chiao. Internalize that. Only then will you finally wake up and find that the world is waiting for you.

Note from the future: looking back at this trip report a full semester later is extremely nostalgic, though this was written just three months ago. I had no idea, writing this in the daze of my first week at UBC, how my summary here would come to symbolize everything I love about the VOC and BC in general. Though I could be much more verbose in my language and description (which I no doubt enjoy doing), the simplicity of my writing in some way speaks to the humility that comes with being a beginner in a club like this. I was genuinely just in awe at the fact that I could go on an outdoors trip - even a rather simple and straightforward one like this - with a group of random people, on a regular Sunday, and create a story that I would remember for years to come.

# Growers Not Showers

*Toji Nakabayashi*

*August 31- September 1 (into September 2... but did it ever really end? Are we still in the gully?)*

*Semaphore Lakes, Train Glacier Pemberton*

*Participants: Anushika Jain, Eleanor Hsiun, Lizzie Woodley, Patric Berard, Toji Nakabayashi*

**P**lease enjoy our mistakes and adventures... someone should...

Pick up was set. Noon at Broadway City Hall, aka Wendy's, (well, Patric Berard and Lizzie Woodley - Toji Nakabayashi and Eleanor Hsiun were already in our trusty ride, and Anushika Jain was bouldering at Grand Wall - to be picked up on route through Squamish). Either way, by 1:30 am, we were all going to be en route to Pemberton! We'd set up camp at Semaphore Lakes for the night, rip up the traverse, and promptly head back to Van. Chill, easy, fun! Very nice.

Well, traffic was immediately worse than anticipated, and our ETA was delayed (maybe we should have just turned around then...). But no worries, what's a little traffic on the Sea to Sky? We do this all the time.

We arrived at our first stop in Squamish shortly after two pm (not the worst) and had a short pick up/drop off exchange at the Chief's parking lot (pick up Anushika, a few drop offs at the outhouse). Back on the road! Well, just until Wendy's down the road. But then we were really off!

We had a fairly chill ride to Pemberton. En route, it was determined that Flume was not well-represented on Subaru Speakers - and "Anxiety" was not on any. We arrived at the FSR (Forest Service Road), which was arguably nicer than many streets in Vancouver, and climbed to the Semaphore Lakes' parking lot. We were quick to hop out of the car to stretch our legs and start



our adventure, but were once again quick with some warnings of what was to come as we heard thunder nearby – only to learn that Patric had not brought a rainjacket... No worries, the forecast hadn't predicted rain, so we were good! Right? Right!

5:30 pm. We began our hike to Semaphore Lakes. If all went well, we'd be back by around the same time tomorrow!  
(Spoiler: all did not go well).

About 55 minutes into our hike, we were feeling good (Toji mainly 'cause he'd just cracked open a cider). Only a few drops of rain and beautiful views. We came across a marked intersection and met a disgruntled solo hiker on their way down.

“You guys doing the traverse? I see your helmets.”

“Yup! Did you just finish it?”

A pause and a defeated sigh. “Yes”

We learned that the scrambler had completed the traverse clockwise, having to descend Face Mountain, which they recommended against. Unfortunately, in addition to somewhat of a treacherous descent, they'd also seen no birds - despite AllTrails suggesting that this is a good spot for them.

Having shared their hard-earned beta, they predicted we'd probably be able to finish it in 7.5 hours.

We parted ways, feeling rather optimistic about our plan to complete the traverse counter-clockwise and in less time than a full workday!

*Top to bottom*

**1** Water break on the side of a grassy hill

**2** Locomotive summit selfie

**3** Peering into the depths of the gully

*All taken by Toji Nakabayashi*

We set up camp at the second lake, though it resembled something more like the suburbs, given our poor spacing efforts.

### **Next: A swim, dinner, and cider!**

Eleanor had prepared a steak feast, supported by mashed potatoes from Toji and Patric. We also shared a lovely 2 L bottle of Summer Peach Growers Cider. What a night! We tucked in early, planning to be up and at 'em by 7 am, and hiking out at 8.

From here, I'll leave you to follow our story via photo-documentation and vague time stamps. But you now have all the context to know that our trip plan was quickly DERAILED (train jokes!).

### **Timeline by Toji**

- 8:30 am - Start hiking (already behind schedule).
- 9:04 am - Crossing the river to start the climb.
- 10:15 am - Lots of loose screen side hilling and climbing.
- 12:49 pm - Most of the way up Face. We had lunch and a water break on a nice patch of green (a tiny stream, more like drops of water). Little did we know that was the last water source till we descended to the lake. Although maybe after about 100 meters, we found another water source which seemed like a waterfall in relation to our previous water source.
- 1:30 pm - Summited our first peak of the day! Face Mountain stoke is high.
- 2:46 pm - We summited Faceless without issue. We had more snacks, danced on the helipad, and started discussing how we might get back to camp a little bit later than we had planned.
- 3:30 pm - Halfway to the locomotive, the sun is hot and feeling thirsty. I assumed there would be running water since we saw snow patches on the path, but nothing. We shove snow into a water bottle and hope for the best.
- 4:43 pm - Around the base of the locomotive we are pooped, discussing possibly skipping the last summit altogether and just heading down. The McDonald's Coke Zero calls to quench thy thirst.
- 5:13 pm - We hit a landmark. I see the summit just 15 minutes away, and we get stoked and just go for it ("last push" was said about the eighth time at this point)
- 5:28 pm - Summit Locomotive and hit our last high point of the day, tons of nasty flies on the summit block, so we don't loiter for long. Seeing the campsite from the summit gave us hope, and the beta says there is a trail to follow all the way down. An optimistic 2 hours, I hope!
- 5:50 pm - Nearly died slipping off a sketchy class 5 move.
- 5:52 pm - Look down at a very steep and vertical-looking gully.

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- 5:53 pm - GPS updates and says we are not on the path, so we are actually about 10 meters off and supposed to be on the other side of said gully.
- 6:00 pm - Make a group decision to go down the gully
- 6:01 pm - The wonderful sound of tumbling rocks as my stomach also rumbles with hunger, McDonald's calls
- 6:52 pm - Around halfway down the gully, Lizzie and I take shelter behind a wall and tell the others to start descending.
- 6:55 pm - Discover there is a signal in the gully, it must act like nature's anetenna, doomscroll some reels while listening to rocks tumbling by.
- 6:58 pm - Facetime a friend to whom I was sending reels to; they could not help us
- 7:20 pm - We have safely gotten out of the gully, sighs of relief, hungry, the McDonald's calls
- 7:28 pm - Gain the ridge and back on track, but now the sun has set
- 7:29 pm - Look back at the gully and go how the fuck
- 7:54 pm - Starting to realize that there is no smooth trail back to the campsite. Put on headlamps.
- 8:24 pm - Attempting to religiously follow the trail and GPS track, but the trail keeps branching out to cliffs and other nonsense. Lots of backtracking. Morale semi-low.
- 9:24 pm - Finally finish the main descent and get to the lake. Much water is drunk, but I still thirst for Coke Zero. McDonald's calls.
- 10:04 pm - Back at the campsite, we pack, rest and I eat some canned chili with Patric, but the stomach yearns for McDonald's.
- 11:21 pm - We are finally back at the car, do a little jig, and hit the road.

### \*\*THE NEXT DAY\*\*

12 something - Get a signal in Pemberton and learn that the McDonald's is closed. Pull up pants and hunker down to rush to the Squamish one; the McDonald's is calling.

1:44 am - A highway closure just 15 minutes before Squamish has us apparently stuck till 4:30 am and has us losing hope.

3:00 am - Hear the sounds of rushing wind? No, it's the sound of cars! The highway is open again.

3:16 am - The McDonald's is real, I take a sip of ice-cold Coke Zero, and the journey is now complete.

# Being tested on Brooks Peninsula: 10 days of things going minorly wrong

*AC Muller with contributions from  
Ignatius Zhou*

*May 1st - 10th, 2025*

*Participants: Ignatius Zhou, Lorin Jacot, Duncan MacIntyre, Laura Römer, AC Muller (and Sri Chaitanya until day three, read the report to know why his trip was cut short)*

## Preface

This is a very long trip report. Some events will be spoken about in lavish detail, because they shaped the way this trip would go. There are also additions from Ignatius Zhou about bear spray, foraging seaweed and fires. I want to share both the good and the bad of this trip, so please enjoy countless retellings of minor injuries, sicknesses and days spent slightly hurting in my tent. But let me spoil something: nothing went seriously wrong, but a lot of things went minorly wrong.

If you're only here for beta, and not the story of the actual trip, you can stop after the section "The Plan and Beta." If you're here for the entire thing, then, well, make yourself some tea and get ready for a long read.

## The Background Story

Back in May 2024, Duncan MacIntyre organized a VOC trip where we backpacked along Nootka Island for five days, which turned out to be the best week of my life. We all enjoyed it so much that we decided to plan something similar for May 2025. After countless conversations and Zoom calls, we finally settled on Brooks Peninsula - a peninsula on the west coast of Vancouver Island, a bit further north than Nootka.

## The Plan and Beta

Now the challenge arose of planning the actual trip. While the Nootka Trail is

## VOCJ68

an established route, we found very limited information on Brooks. Our main source was a trip report from 2010 (<https://forums.clubtread.com/27-british-columbia/34979-brooks-peninsula-coastal-overland-hike.html>), so we knew this would likely be outdated – the bushes would likely have overgrown, and water sources may have changed.

Duncan miraculously managed to use Google Earth to find possible campsites (in other words, places near water sources) and, in general, planned all of our routes. Only about the first 3 km have marked trails – everything else is very much a case of Choose Your Own Adventure, and of course, bushwacking.

So, this was the plan (see routes below):

We'd spend the first night car camping in Fair Harbour, where we'd then be picked up by the Siiqaa Water Taxi company and be dropped off at the Southern end of the peninsula in Columbia Cove. Our dream was to backpack along the coastline, then walk along a ridge to avoid Cape Cook (labelled as "almost impassable" and involving "class 5 bushclimbing" by the 2010 hikers), continue on the beaches and finally, spend three days making our way across the peninsula back to where we started. Circumnavigating Brooks, that was the dream. The last part would include bushwacking, ridge-walking and heading through marshlands. I should also add that there was almost no information to be found on this crossing, so the feasibility of this was very much up in the air. After analysing satellite pictures and topographical maps, we settled on a route we would attempt. Below are the various options - we decided to focus on the route in turquoise.

For anybody curious, the cost of this trip was around \$360 per person - this includes the ferry, gas costs and the water taxi.

We were all very much aware that the likelihood of us genuinely succeeding in making the crossing was not particularly high, but we wanted to try nonetheless. We, of course, calculated in three rest/buffer days, since we knew this trip could take many turns. But little did we know just how many little things would eventually go wrong.

For those of you who are only here for the beta: Unfortunately, we only wound up making it a little past Campsite 2 due to a combination



Routes AC Muller

of factors (mainly injuries and weather). We can therefore not provide any information on the possibility of crossing, or even just the northern side of the peninsula. If anybody does indeed attempt the crossing, please feel free to contact us! We would love to hear about your experience, as some of us are determined to return one day and actually complete the circumnavigation.

### The Trip

#### MAY 2nd

The water taxi ride in and of itself was an adventure. The waters were a bit rough, and we watched our packs get soaked by the seaspray from inside the dry cabin. The skipper shared lots of intriguing information about the local waters, beaches and forests, and, VERY exciting for me, the local whale migration.

After over an hour on the boat, we arrived and immediately had to take shelter underneath a tree to shield us from the pouring rain. What a start!

Excitingly, we found an established trail leaving from the beach we were dropped off at. The trail was muddy and in parts steep, but we knew we'd reach beaches to hike on very soon. In the meantime, we had to cross sections with what felt like quicksand, and found astounding trees covered by moss. The nature on the west coast is truly incredible.

We reached an enormous sandy beach, where, to our surprise, we encountered another group camping (Let's call them "Campers"), who were planning on leaving the peninsula on May 4th after spending several days at this beach. We chatted with them for a bit, and told them our plan - jokingly, I said "Hey who knows, watch us turn around and see you guys again in two days". If only I had known this would be somewhat true.

We continued hiking along beaches, had to cross very wide rivers and encountered another section through the forest. Now when I say there was an established trail, I should add that this trail included climbing over and under various fallen trees, using ropes to get up and down steeper sections, and countless parts where the trail was so muddy that we had to find a way around

**Left** And so it Begins! *Sri Chaitanya* **Right** Walking on Wet Sand *AC Muller*



it, or simply suffer through the mud.

On the next set of sandy beaches, Lorin Jacot and Ignatius started walking further ahead. We had now split up into three pairs, with Sri Chaitanya and I in the middle and Laura Römer and Duncan not far behind us. After some beach walking, we had rock fields to cross. While many are easy to walk on with many flat sections, others include lots of ups and downs. This is where the first (and biggest) issue of the trip arose - unfortunately, Sri slipped on a high rock and fell, hitting his side and head on the rocks at the bottom. His thumb was bleeding and in pain. We took some time to assess the situation, since he also hit his head quite badly - but he seemed to mainly worry about whether his camera cracked (it didn't). Now, this fall may not seem like a big deal, but I can genuinely say that it could have gone very, very wrong. The impact from his fall was so intense that his Nalgene cracked, which are famously robust. After making sure he wasn't concussed, he insisted on continuing, even though his thumb was aching. So, we continued walking across the rocks for a bit (now even more careful) until we decided to take a break to discuss what to do next. Lo and behold, his thumb had now swollen and become increasingly painful - making him believe it may have been fractured. It was very quickly decided that we would have to somehow get him back to Fair Harbour and then to a medical clinic. Once Laura and Duncan caught up, we InReached Ignatius and Lorin to let them know we will not be following any time soon, telling them to wait at Campsite 1 until we arrive, however long that may be. The plan was made for us four to hike back to Alternative Campsite 1 to camp for a night, and then make our way back to the Campers and ask if Sri and I (so he wouldn't have to go alone) could join their water taxi and potentially get a ride back to Campbell River. However, we didn't hear back from Ignatius and Lorin (their InReaches were off to save battery) - so Laura and Duncan hiked to Campsite 1 to update them on the situation in person, while Sri and I would start backtracking.

Now by this time, the tide had come up and we had to scramble over high rocks - which is not particularly easy with only one hand, so props to Sri for making it across. We set up camp, and watched the sun go down while starting to cook our homemade dehydrated Thai Green Curry. Laura and Duncan finally came back, sharing a remarkable story.

*Get ready for Ignatius' tale of the infamous Bear Spray Incident.*

While many things were happening in the group behind (Sri's thumb incident), Lorin and I got to the mouth of Cladothamnus Creek and started setting up camp. As I put my backpack on the ground, I heard a hissing sound. I turned it over to discover that my bear spray hanging on the outside had sprayed all over my bag. I then picked up everything to wash it in the nearby creek. Walking over, I inspected the bear spray by holding the spray can right

up to my face while having my thumb over the trigger. I don't remember what exactly caused that thumb to then firmly press down while the nozzle was facing me, maybe I tripped on a rock or something, but the next thing I knew, the air became very spicy. This was followed by thirty minutes of waterboarding myself in a questionably brown river while Duncan showed up yelling about some broken finger. There are a few things I learned from this incident. One, the blindness caused by bear spray is not permanent. Two, there is a slight delay of about five seconds before the spray takes effect, at least on a human. And three, don't carabiner an unholstered bear spray to your backpack while bushwhacking, the safety will come off. I would like to say I also learned to not point dangerous things at my face, but this was the third time I had tried to inflict self harm, the other two being shooting a pellet gun into my eye to check if it was loaded and inspecting a lit fire cracker to see if it would blow up when I was a child. Anyways, I think I should be trusted with a firearm.

After I had regained some intelligibility, I understood that Sri got injured and Duncan was hiking back to check on him. Seeing the time on our hands, Lorin and I decided to build a bridge. This was the first of many bridges we'd build on this trip, each improving on the last. We tried various methods, including making a very wide bridge with two parallel logs and smaller wood pieces lying between them, which did not work because there was too much natural variation in size, and wet driftwood does not have a lot of friction. Our first bridge had been washed away by the rising river by the time Laura got to us the second night, so we constructed another bridge higher up on the riverbank, which (spoiler alert!) provided passage for Duncan and AC on day three as well. Our final bridge consisted of four massive **logs** crossing a wide river, connecting via a large boulder in the middle of the river.

### MAY 3rd

Sri and I were of course both devastated not to continue the trip, but we knew it was the right decision. Luckily, the Campers agreed immediately to taking Sri with them, and made it very clear that they would take care of him so I wouldn't have to cut my trip short - they would bring him all the way to Nanaimo. After some long conversations, we decided we would take up that offer. Duncan and I dropped him off with the Campers, and to stick with the theme of this trip, I started getting a fierce migraine on the hike back (as so often). This leads to disorientation, and losing about 50% of my vision, so I of course wound up smashing my head into a tree, making the headache even worse and adding to the dizziness. But hey, what to do, I had no choice but to continue.

We returned to where we had camped to find Laura and all her belongings gone. She'd left us a note saying she had been picked up by Lorin and would meet us at Campsite 1 the next day - they also left us a radio which we

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were meant to use to call in with them at every full hour. At first Duncan and I had planned to still make the trek to our group members the same evening. However, I quickly realised that my migraine would not allow me to do so. It was a bad one (i.e. my whole body was shaking from the pain), so I took various painkillers and melatonin and just crawled into my sleeping bag and luckily fell asleep.

### MAY 4th

The next morning, Duncan and I finally headed off to Campsite 1, where we should have arrived two days ago. After reuniting with our group members, we started the hike to Campsite 2. We knew we still had a chance at completing our original plan of circumnavigating the peninsula, since we added some buffer days - but to be entirely honest, I had at this point lost faith. But nevertheless, we hiked across beaches, logs, rocks and meadows.

Duncan and I (as always) had some crazy discussions about the intricacies of life, while enjoying the sound of the waves and (surprisingly) the sun on our skin. And then we heard the wolves. Let me tell you, hearing three wolves howl and bark at once was a life-changing experience. I don't know why this moment meant so much to me, but I got quite emotional.

Just before the campsite we reached a bay which turned into my favourite view of the trip: sea stacks, trees, blue waters and lots of logs.

We ultimately arrived at the second campsite, where we made a fire and had a wonderful meal together during the sunset. I feel like this is a good moment to talk about food. Ignatius had made a very interesting decision for his dinners and lunches: he had brought 1.5 kg of rice, fish powder and some other spices. Every morning, he cooked rice which he stored in his Thermos for lunch (which made me laugh because Ignatius is supposedly ultralight). And then he would have rice again for dinner. But to add some flavour, he foraged seaweed every single day and added it to his rice. So you heard it here first folks: roasting seaweed during coastal hikes is a very good idea.

### *Some more Ignatius-wisdom for you all:*

So I know AC is going to make fun of me in her report for self-proclaiming as ultralight, but consider this: all the seaweed I consumed was food weight that I didn't have to carry, and I ate quite a few pounds of seaweed. Fucus made up the majority of my foraged diet, while other intertidal seaweeds like Egregia and Mastocarpus made for nice side dishes. I would grill them on a fork or fry them in coconut oil, and some, I boiled in fresh water to decrease the salt content. The only thing I really knew about seaweeds before going on this trip was that none of them will kill you, so I tried new seaweeds each day in small amounts before cooking meals with them. In total, I probably attempted to consume about ten different seaweeds, some of which

were too tough to eat. There was also an abundance of mussels and gooseneck barnacles. I avoided both because of paralytic shellfish poisoning concerns, but later found out the gooseneck barnacles are not as susceptible to it (the source of this information may be questionable). So this is not advice to go eat them, but I did forage a bunch a few weeks later near Sooke, and they were delicious. In addition to the stuff I ate there, I harvested Sitka spruce tips on the last evening, dried them next to our campfire and brought them home for tea.

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### **MAY 5th**

We had decided to attempt the ridge-crossing around Cape Cook, and were preparing for our bushwack. But for God knows what reason (\*cough cough Duncan taking hours to pack up), we only left the campsite around noon - way too late, let me tell you that. The second we entered the forest, we knew this would pose a difficult feat. We had moved roughly 300 meters in 25 minutes - that's how dense the forest was. We had to duck, or sometimes crawl underneath some logs. We had to push our way through dense shrubs. We had to balance over dodgy fallen trees that to me did not seem safe to walk on - especially the one that was two meters above the ground. Now I should say, I am not a big fan of bushwacking, and I was getting increasingly worried about the crossing - what if the entire last three days will be spent doing exactly this, but with hundreds of metres of elevation? I could feel my morale dropping by the second. At some point we decided to stop and discuss our options. Some calculations led to us realising we won't make it to the next campsite before 2 a.m. if we were to continue at the current speed, and that without taking breaks. The weather report from our InReach had also shown a very rainy and stormy next day, so we were unsure whether we'd want to be bushwacking and camping on ridges during that. Ultimately, we made the tough decision to give up on our dream of circumnavigating the peninsula, and simply bushwack back to the coast and make our way back to the campsite from there. From there, we could either do a daytrip into the mountains, or just chill at the beach. The bushwack to the coast was more of the same, all leading to a funny moment in retrospect: I stepped onto what looked like a log, but it seemed like it was only the very top of a fallen tree, and the rest had rotten away. So, my leg simply fell through the floor, forcing Laura to pull me out. We finally reached the ocean, and Duncan and Ignatius decided to scramble around the side of a huge rock to scout the next bay, in case we had wanted to camp there instead of our original campsite. At some point they turned back, and since there was no good water source, we decided to make our way back to Campsite 2 - but this time by scrambling along the rocks on the coast instead of the bushwack. While the idea was



**Top left** Best View of the Trip  
*Duncan MacIntyre*

**Top right** Meadows - Our Favourite  
Terrain  
*Laura Romer*

**Top to bottom**

**1** I LOVE THE WEST COAST  
*Duncan Macintyre*



**2** Starfish! *Duncan MacIntyre*

originally to explore the area a bit, we all wound up just spending the evening at the beach, some of us reading on our Kindles. Ignatius tried to catch a fish, but unfortunately did not succeed - more seaweed it was! I think we were all a bit disappointed that we were turning back instead of the crossing, but it was simply not feasible this time. To add to the frustration, Duncan's tentpole decided to break. Luckily, this exact issue had happened last year at Nootka, so he knew how to fix it - some duct tape would do the trick. Spoiler alert: this was not the last time one of his poles would break.

### **MAY 6th**

The day after was an interesting one. It had indeed started raining heavily and became quite stormy overnight. We decided to use one of our buffer days and stay put, especially now that we had all the time in the world. Ignatius and Lorin had built an impressive bridge over the creek - but due to the water rising by several meters during the storm, we woke up to the bridge having been swept away.

Unfortunately, I had woken up with a swollen hand and rashes. I am suspecting some sort of allergic reaction, possibly to some plant we came across while bushwacking. That was not the main health issue I faced that day though - I had also woken up with a fever. My entire body was burning, I was overheating in my sleeping bag and I simply felt very weak overall. So, I spent the day sleeping and reading in the tent, trying to shake off this feeling. I remember only leaving the tent a single time to grab my food bag from our bear hang at 5 p.m. - before that, I had simply not eaten anything. I don't recommend.

It was raining and storming so much that the fly didn't properly shield the tent, so I also had to deal with a huge pool of water right at my feet, causing my sleeping bag to be soaking wet at the bottom. So, I stuffed my puffy into it, which did actually keep my feet dry. Duncan reported the others were standing around the fire, where they kept turning like the meat at a Doner Kebab place, hoping the heat will dry them off faster than the rain can soak through (which worked). I was then informed that we would be hiking back to Campsite 1 the next day, very much hoping I would feel better by then.

*A note from Ignatius, our fire doctor, about (surprise surprise), fires:*

We got very efficient at starting fires on this trip, so much so that I pretty much cooked all my food and purified all my water on a wood fire. I thought I'd share a few things we learned. The most useful tools we found while trying to light damp wood on a windy beach were my waxed hemp rope and Lorin's wind screen (for his white gas stove). The waxed rope can catch a spark from a ferro rod and be held beneath a pile of tinder through a gap

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between the bottom of the windscreen and the ground. The best place to find dry wood (at least on Brooks, where it constantly rains and there is no good access to the forest) is small dead branches that snap clean off (instead of bending), particularly of oily conifers. Or, you can shave off pieces from the side of driftwood that has been exposed to the sun, but be careful not to go too deep into the wet core. Other items I had were a Zippo (works better in the wind than other lighters), a stick of fat wood (helped the initial fire burn hotter), and a pocket bellow (for blowing on the initial fire), but you could do without these. In the conditions we had, the initial fire had to be constantly tended and blown on, so starting it fast required two people. To keep the fire going overnight while it's raining without tending it, we buried the charcoal in layers of sand. We would put one layer of sand over charcoal, allowing the wood to keep burning, then another layer over the new charcoal, and so on.

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### MAY 7th

The next morning the weather gods treated us with gorgeous blue skies. We headed off across meadows, rocks and sand, looking out for whales and finding gorgeous wildflowers along the way. I realised I was still feeling quite bad, the fever definitely had not been overcome yet, and I was also feeling dizzy. So all in all, not great. But nonetheless, we were so grateful for the blue skies after the rainy day we had had the day before.

Lorin and I decided to stop at some tidal pools in the rocks, where he went for a lovely swim. The

**Left** Attempted Bushwacking... It was dense  
*Lorin Jacot*

**Bottom left** One of our Many Fires  
*AC Muller*

**Bottom right** Blue skies! *Duncan MacIntyre*



evening was concluded with yet another fire and a dinner fuelled by seaweed.

### **MAY 8th**

Lo and behold, we were facing yet another stormy day. Unfortunately, after quite an uncomfortable night, I had woken up with severe back pains. I, to this day, don't know what the issue was, although I'm assuming I tweaked a nerve or something. All I know is that the tiniest movement hurt like hell, so I stayed in my tent and read for the entire day. Fun fact: I'm writing this two months later and the pain from this injury has not fully disappeared yet.

By dinner time, the rain had stopped, allowing us to come together once more to enjoy the evening. I somehow managed to limp over there, but it was tough - even laughing was incredibly painful, causing me to almost collapse several times. It seemed like Ignatius had made it his mission to make me laugh as much as he could, because despite the pain it caused, the laughter lifted my spirits (so trust me, he was not being mean or actively trying to cause me pain. I was grateful for the goofiness). At some point Duncan said the following: "Guys I have a really funny story, although it might be a bit offensive towards Swiss people". So despite this odd start, Duncan started telling his story, but even just the first sentence made us question what was going on in his head: "So I went to a funeral...". Not how funny stories typically begin. After some more silliness, we made the plan to hike back to the sandy beach (where we had met the Campers) the next day, where we were to spend our last night.

I should also add that Duncan, who graduated with honours in Physics and Maths just last year, somehow thought it would be a good idea to dry off his boots by the fire. Well, that actually just melted parts of their sole. Luckily, they were still wearable and still functioned. Still a funny anecdote though.

### **MAY 9th**

The hike back began, and so did the realisation that this would be our last full day on the peninsula. After spending nine days outdoors and away from civilization, the idea of returning to reality seemed very daunting. Despite everything that had already gone wrong on this trip, I was quite sad about the end nearing, so I tried to simply enjoy every second of the trip and the last full day.

My back was still very painful, but Tylenol helped to get through the hike - and surprisingly, the backpack did too by preventing any unnecessary rotation.

We walked across beaches and through muddy forests, and eventually arrived at the campsite - a ginormous sandy beach with logs everywhere, and a wonderful creek right beside us. Laura and I decided to first run into the

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ocean, and then into the creek to wash off the saltwater - simply nothing beats feeling somewhat clean while out in the wilderness. While drying off, Lorin taught us how to play a Swiss card game called Apple which entertained us for the next couple of hours.

After Duncan's arrival I had started setting up the tent, only to find that yet another one of his tentpoles had broken in the exact same way as the last one. So after he finished his swim, he fixed it once again and promised he would contact MSR about the recurring issue (Duncan, take this as public shaming in case you haven't).

That evening turned into my favourite of the trip. We had a lavish dinner, including a wonderful plate of sausage, cheese and seaweed beforehand - staying true to the Swiss tradition of Apéro. Sitting around the fire, we began reminiscing about the trip - and then things got crazy. I don't know how or why, but suddenly we started wrestling each other, in particular Duncan and Ignatius. At some point, we had all been tired out, so we decided to retreat to the tents and sleep with the sound of waves crashing in the background one last time.

### **MAY 10th**

There it was: our very last morning together. After packing up everything, we slowly started hiking back towards where the water taxi would pick us up. It was an odd feeling, knowing we would have to soon interact with other human beings again. Those ten days were enough to make me feel very odd about simply going back to real life the way we know it.

After a little over an hour, we arrived back at the bay where we'd be picked up - 45 minutes earlier than when the boat was scheduled to arrive. I think we all had lots to process, so for some reason we retreated to our own little spots spread across the bay. I scrambled up a rocky wall over the sea, giving me a panoramic view of the bay and the small islands off the coast. As if they had known we were early, the water taxi somehow arrived roughly 15 minutes after us.

Definitely feeling a bit overwhelmed by the trip so suddenly ending, we climbed onto the boat and set off back to Fair Harbour. This time, there was no rain and the waters were a lot less rough. So, our skipper let us stand in the outside area at the back of the boat. Laura and I spent the next hour, or however long the ride was, enjoying the waves and seaspray on our faces, spotting the occasional otter. Soon enough, we arrived back in Fair Harbour and played with the dogs owned by the people working at the General Store and the marina. Ignatius and I spent the drive back chatting about the advantages and disadvantages social media brings to society, and at some point started "singing", giving the others a performance via the radios we had brought.

We all got back together to have a fantastic meal on the way, and then spent some time exploring Nanaimo before heading to the ferry - Cold Front Gelato has INCREDIBLE pistachio ice cream, just so you know.

One short ferry ride and some more driving later, we were back in Vancouver and its lights, people, everything. Whenever I return from a trip, especially a longer one, I have this sudden realisation that time didn't stop, and life simply continued back home. People went to work, went on walks with their dogs, and shopped at No Frills. Just because we were so far away from all of that and took a break from everything, doesn't mean the city was at a standstill. I am yet to fully comprehend this. Am I alone in this feeling?

### **Some reflections and last thoughts**

A lot of things went wrong on this trip. But all in all, I am so grateful that nothing required an SAR (Search and Rescue) call or anything similar. Yes, Sri got injured and had to leave. Yes, Duncan broke his tent, his backpack and probably his back from his way too heavy pack. Yes, I had a whole bunch of health issues. Yes, we failed at the circumnavigation. Those were all things that I wish hadn't happened, but they did. And luckily, we all made it out safely and without any major injuries. All in all, this trip tested my mental endurance of simply getting through tons of little challenges like nothing before. Despite everything that happened, this was an absolutely incredible trip and I am so grateful to everybody who played a part in it. Second year in a row going on a West Coast trip in early May - I wonder what 2026 has in store for us.

Thank you for reading this admittedly very long report. If anybody has any further questions about the planning of this trip or Brooks in general, just reach out to me – I can seriously recommend exploring the Island's coast!

**Below** The Crew Group Pic *Taken by a phone on a log xD*



# **An Elephant, Yellow Rocks and Big Glaciers: Welcome to Athelney Pass**

*Paul Ramu*

*July 31st - August 4th 2025*

*Athelney Pass*

*Participants: Ana Ciocoiu, Isaac Borrego, Chrisel Barko, Josh Ma, Paul Ramu*

The first time I heard about Athelney Pass was during a routine stop at the Pemberton McDonald's when Isaac Borrego and I were discussing our summer plans. I quickly looked it up and was instantly amazed by that place, so much so that I felt it was worth disrupting my carefully curated summer program and making a trip there happen. Isaac pulled the trigger for the BC Day long weekend with Ana Ciocoiu, Josh Ma, and Chrisel Barko. We headed there for a three-night trip at the Pass, where we would set up base camp and explore the peaks surrounding it.

Expecting a long approach, we left Vancouver on Thursday in the evening and camped on the way at the Upper Lillooet Rec Site, then our plans to wake up early fell through as we all slept in... Fast-forward a few hours, a heavily rutted FSR and a coyote sighting later, we parked the truck at the impasse and started hiking under blue skies and through fields of fireweed. Soon, we would reach the end of the FSR walk – signaling the beginning of the long route-finding sections ahead of us.

A short bushwhack through a burnt forest led us to the pebbles bordering Salal Creek, where the water would force us to head back into the forest now and then with some easy bushwhacking (thanks to all who helped create a little path!), but we were rewarded with some delicious plum-sized salmonberries. Mosquitoes quickly let us know they run this place, and the constant buzzing from their flight would become the theme song of the trip. After a few hours the “easy” hiking would come to an end, and we would start the climb on boulders and loose rocks to the pass itself. Progress was slow,



**Above** Up a moraine towards Athelney Pass *Isaac Borrego*

but the views of the (rapidly receding) glaciers on the Guthrum Massif and the colorful rocks of Salal Peak's south flanks were a great motivator.

The boulders turned into flat swampy meadows for the last couple of kilometres, and the elevation gain grunt was replaced by the challenge of how to keep our feet dry through this creek maze (we just gave up after a while...). The weight of our packs (three days of food plus glacier gear) and the relative difficulty of the approach were starting to be felt, but at last, eight hours after leaving the car, we would reach the unofficially named Banana Lake with great relief.

Athelney Pass is one of those places that look amazing in pictures, but actually exceed expectations when experienced in real life. Ana and I pitched the tent on a sandy beach right by the lake and with glacier views, making this spot one of my favorite campsites ever. We also quickly found out that this area was apparently the headquarters for the horsefly and mosquito empire, as Josh can testify to – considering he had chosen not to bring a tent...

For our first full day at the pass, we took it very easy in the morning and simply relaxed around the lake. I literally spent hours just lying in my tent, protected from the local flying “wildlife,” admiring our surroundings. In the afternoon, we climbed the steep hill north of camp to get a good vantage point of the glaciers across the valley – its round-shaped slopes indicating the former presence of thick glaciers everywhere.

While Ana, Josh, and Chrisel hiked back to camp to swim in the lake, Isaac and I decided to scramble up Ochre Mountain, which really stands out with its bright colors – although its beauty is absolutely not matched by the quality of its rock (“giant pile of loose shit” is the technical term to describe this mountain). Next, we would head towards Salal Peak, which would have us scramble around the Elephant, a crumbly volcanic feature (which reminded

## VOCJ68

me of Black Tusk in some ways) that actually does look like an elephant.

There was enough snow between the rock and the Salal Glacier that the ascent was not unpleasant, unlike the Ochre climb. The statistics for this peak may not be impressive, but the views are incredible and unique. Beyond the expansive Salal Glacier, we could see the impressive Lillooet Icefield and several rarely visited three-thousanders soaring from it, and to the south we could see ominous Mount Meager and Overseer Mountain, home of the Harrison Hut. We soaked in the views for a while and then headed back to the pass, checking out an abandoned and collapsed mining shack on the way.

We were only days away from the Perseid meteor showers, so waking up in the middle of the night was a treat, with up to a couple of shooting stars every minute, a sweet bonus to an already exceptional trip!

At sunrise, we got ready for our ascent of Icemaker Mountain, a beautiful glaciated peak on the north side of the pass. We stayed on the lateral moraine on the climber's right as long as we could and then donned the crampons to switch to blue ice. It was my first time travelling on such a large section of blue ice, so I was very excited, and a couple of innocent-looking yet potentially deadly moulins did ensure we would remain focused. The smooth ice was a real piece of art, as it was sculpted with a maze of streams of various depths, some flowing all the way to the bottom of the glacier, others disappearing into moulins or crevasses.

The snow started just below the first convexity, so we roped up and went around the worst of this heavily crevassed section. From the drone footage of the previous day, this was supposed to be the worst, but soon we would reach another smaller convexity, with some monster crevasses that could eat a truck. My legs disappeared a few times, sucked in by weak snow bridges over smaller crevasses.

Eventually, we made it to a point where jumps were necessary, but knowing the team was solid, it was actually more fun than scary. Past the bergschrund, instead of going for the rocky ridge above the glacier for a light scramble to the top, we opted for a steep snow climb involving a few mixed steps at the end, which was the cherry on the Icemaker cake! From the top, we could see more large glaciers, and a plethora of peaks that probably nobody has climbed or even named. A junk-food packed meal and countless pictures later, we started our plod down.



*To the right*

**Top** Five-Star accommodation, room with views. Pool included.  
*Isaac Borrego*

**Bottom** Ochre Mountain  
*Isaac Borrego*

**Below** Nature's Artwork  
*Isaac Borrego*

*Left page*

**Left** Salal Glacier with Lillooet Icefield Behind  
*Isaac Borrego*

**Right** The Elephant, a Crumbling Volcanic Formation  
*Ana Ciocoiu*



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The snow bridges were still decently strong considering the snow was cooking under the sun, although my legs did disappear a few more times. We were back at camp mid-afternoon, right on time for a swim in Banana Lake to wrap up one of my favorite days in the mountains.

The morning was unfortunately not as enjoyable as the previous days, knowing we would need to leave this place, hike out, and that I caught a cold (or rather, someone gave me their cold) and felt weak all day. The hike out was pretty uneventful, except for a dishwasher-sized boulder that declared independence from its mountain and rolled down a steep slope forever, creating a long-lasting cloud of dust and a thunder-like rumble.

Some six hours later we were back at the truck, and after feasting on blueberries, we began the long drive home, with an obligatory stop in Pemby for some slightly-more-real food and ice cream.

All in all, Athelney Pass was everything I had dreamed of and even better. The approach wasn't as bad as I expected it to be, as the route has been somewhat maintained and the bushwhacking is minimal and easy, but it is by no means an easy hike – especially with heavy packs. Looking at some not-so-old pictures, the glaciers there are melting fast, and we are probably among the last generations that can observe them from up close and ascend those peaks, which is a devastating and depressing thought.

That was a fantastic way to experience the best BC has to offer for the BC Day long weekend, and in great company!

**Below** Always use protection when playing with crevasses *Isaac Borrego*



# Wedgemount Five Peaks Traverse

*Julian Larsen*

*August 25th, 2025  
Wedgemount Lake, BC  
Participants: Julian Larsen*

After climbing plans were thwarted at the last minute by a sudden finger injury at the end of August, I was looking for something to do but had no partners available. A heat wave was putting everything local on a spectrum between miserable and deadly, so I decided going somewhere high in elevation would be better than my hot fourth-story apartment. What's the highest point near Squamish? Wedgemount Peak. The issue is that the typical route involves a glacier, which would be quite bad this time of year and would require a partner or two for safety. It is, however, possible to traverse over Wedgemount if you do the entire range...

Given that I was alone and the heat was a concern, I wasn't set on the whole traverse, but I've always liked the idea of ticking off as much as possible when you go to a new area. The first time I hiked on the North Shore I tried to climb all the peaks surrounding the Howe Sound Crest Trail, and the first time I went to Garibaldi Lake, we did a loop around it, trying to tick off as many peaks as possible. It seemed fitting to try to summit all five peaks surrounding Wedgemount Lake for my first foray into the area. The Armchair Traverse is an easier objective with more available information, though, so I decided I would set that as my initial plan and see how the day went.

I woke up early and started the relatively short drive up to the trail-head. I started speeding up the trail, trying to go as fast as I could without running out of breath. The Wedgemount Lake Trail is a bit of a slog, but I finished it up pretty quickly. From there I cut off right before the campsite and started going up Mount Cook. Cook is pretty loose and annoying terrain but

the slog was shorter than some reports had made it out to be. Upon cresting the ridge I got the classic alpine energy boost (does this happen to everyone?) and started running along the ridge between Cook and Weart, which constitutes the Armchair Traverse. It seems to be an increasingly popular scramble and it's easy to see why: it's a long narrow ridge of scrambling with great views all around. I ran as much as possible, slowing down for some of the steeper scrambling. When I hit a snowpatch along the ridge, I decided to refill my water. I opened my bottle, shoved it full of snow and then... couldn't find the cap. I had one big bottle in the back of my vest and one on the strap in front. Unfortunately this meant I could only use the one in the pack from now on. I made it to the summit of Weart relatively quickly and was optimistic about my time. Without waiting around, I continued running down the other side until the low point of the ridge. Feeling good, I checked the time and decided I would go for Wedge, committing myself to the full traverse.

The ridge between Weart and Wedge was glorious: running on a nice smooth ridge with big glaciers on either side. At two low points the glacier passes over the ridge slightly, but in both cases there were no signs of crevasses and I carefully crossed with my ice axe in hand. The ridge started to narrow until I found a bottle on the ground. It had a long-winded message in it that said something along the lines of: "This next part is too scary for us so we bailed". This was an ominous warning, but it turned out to just be a little hop across a gap with some exposure. Perhaps they tried in the winter. It wasn't too crazy in summer at least.

This ridge continued for a while, steepening upwards towards Wedge, with similar scrambling to the Armchair Traverse. Eventually I reached what I was most worried about: a snow arête that still remained in the shade of Wedge's summit. While I had brought a light ice axe, I had decided not to bring crampons. The beginning of the arête was soft enough to go fine with my axe and a long rock I used as a makeshift second axe (an improvised technique for when you don't bring the proper equipment). The exposure was quite large off both sides of the arete, but I could kick good steps in to stay secure. Unfortunately, a few meters from the end the snow became rock-hard sn'ice, and I was suddenly stuck. I did my best to hack out foot steps with my axe and made it across, but in retrospect (and with a top-down view), scrambling down and around the snow patch would've been a much easier option with no crampons. Perhaps a more stupid reason for my decision was that I didn't really need the axe for anything else and wanted to justify bringing it.

With a bit more scrambling I topped the NE arête and ran along the broad ridge to the top of Wedge. I sat down for the first time since getting out of the car and took in the 360 degree views of endless glaciers and peaks. But I didn't stop for long, because I still had a lot of distance to cover. Based on my

stats I thought I wasn't far behind the FKT, and it's mostly downhill from here right? Well it was mostly downhill from here, but not by the definition of the phrase I had hoped for.

While I started running down the ridge, I recalled a quote from Eric Carter (whose track I was following): "I wouldn't wish the Wedge West Ridge descent on my worst enemies." It started out fine, but as it steepened downwards it descended into one of the worst combos you could get for a slope that was relatively mellow in angle. Large (~microwave-sized) blocks sat on top of baseball-sized scree, allowing them to roll and slide a bit when stepped on (or sometimes near). Choosing to stay on patches of the smaller baseball-sized scree didn't save me either, though, as every once in a while a thinly covered slab would reveal itself, making scree running far too nerve wracking. Instead I slogged down the boulders, hopping off them as they moved and taking large steps towards more stable-looking boulders. This technique started giving me knee pain, which really worried me 'cause I had a lot of descending to do, but I made it past the worst of the terrain and the pain mostly dissipated. After that I was left with cut-up and bleeding shins from the microwave-sized blocks that had been periodically rolling past or over my ankle (boy am I glad I didn't crush anything).

The next part looked fine on the map, but closer inspection revealed the nice snow slope that Eric Carter had glissaded was a seriously deteriorating glacier that was purely exposed ice and loose rock. I did a large loop around this which was more unpleasant terrain and extra distance. It was at this point that the heat really started to hit. It was now midday, the sun's rays were starting to peak, and there was no wind now that I wasn't on an exposed ridge. I had been filling up my 1.5 L bottle with snow at every patch I went by, and it would fully melt within 30 minutes. Before having to go back uphill to the Wedge-Parkhurst Col, I started experiencing my first battles with heat exhaustion. I drank water, but it seemed to do nothing to quench my thirst. I unfortunately forgot to pack electrolytes, and I was starting to think that maybe my thirst was insatiable without them at this point. I really started slowing down. Instead of jogging, I looked straight at the ground and thought, "Take the next step, take the next step, take the next step..." over and over for the entire way up to Parkhurst. I had the opportunity to cut under the peak and save a bit of energy but I thought I might as well get to the summit at this point. I sat behind a rock at the summit and ate the last of my food. I had packed a decent amount, but clearly not enough. I knew I needed it if I were to avoid collapse in the next portion.

The entire day I had been slowly turning as the ridge formed a horseshoe around Wedgemount Lake. Unfortunately it seemed that the sun was moving across the sky at the same pace I was getting around the ridge, so my left leg had taken the brunt of the sun for the entire day. At this point it



**1** The far-off summit of Wedge as seen from Cook  
*Julian Larsen*

**2** “The Armchair Traverse”  
*Julian Larsen*

was starting to get really sore - just another problem to add to the ever-growing list. I decided that summiting the last peak, Rethel, was out of the cards. At this point I was just concerned about my safety. I was alone and physical collapse from heat exhaustion seemed genuinely possible.

The last of my food had somehow revitalized me enough to start running down the ridge towards the Parkhurst-Rethel Col. As I approached I looked at Rethel and thought: “It can’t be that bad right? I don’t wanna have to repeat this again”. With that I had deluded myself into finishing the fifth and final peak instead of turning down to my descent. On the uphill I quickly found my energy depleting again, with no more food to give me a boost. I stayed on the right side of the ridge as much as possible to keep out of the sun, but this was much more involved scrambling. Every time I thought I had reached the summit I realized it wasn’t the true peak until eventually I made it to the real thing. (I may have turned around if I had discovered it was another false summit.) By this point I was back at a low point physically, and I could only hope the descent wouldn’t be too bad.

The descent was in fact quite bad. I’m not sure if people typically descend the gully between Parkhurst and Rethel once the snow has melted out, but I certainly wouldn’t do it again without snow. It consisted of steep, hard-packed dirt, with some loose rocks cobbled into the dried mud. Random small cliffs made falling or sliding a very bad option. I downclimbed the slope a bit, but with my footholds and handholds breaking as they freed themselves from the dirt, I decided it would be better to get to solid rock. I opted to downclimb the cliff

beside the gully, staying close above the dirt, but knowing that self-arresting if I fell off would be difficult. To give perspective on how bad this slope was, some of the rocks and boulders in it were periodically falling out and creating mini-landslides without me touching or even being near them. Once it started to become lower angle and I went onto the slope itself, I saw a gaping hole and realized it was an open crevasse. Yes, this slope was also a hidden glacier (not on my map) that was caked with mud and rock.

I did eventually make it down to the lake, and I stumbled and hopped across the boulders along the shore, trying to stay fast as I had seen rockfall coming down these slopes when I was on the Armchair. At the end of the lake I crossed a stream, which I thought I could do without getting wet, but in fact my shoes both filled like buckets and I decided to just walk through it. I celebrated that I had finally made it, but then I realized there was a bit of a bushwhack to get back to the trail. Steep ups and downs through short spiky trees and bushes provided me with more reasons to curse, as my ankles (caked in dried blood) started to bleed again. I thought about diverting to the campsite to beg somebody for food and electrolytes, but when I hit the trail I went into autopilot and just started running down. This run turned into a full on sprint at points, and I started passing people who had come up to the lake for the day. When I saw a bush of huckleberries I dropped everything and started eating as many as possible. A group that I had just ran past caught up again and asked what I was doing so frantically. “Been running all day, ran out of food hours ago.” They gave me a big handful of goldfish, which I gladly shoved into my mouth before continuing my run down. The goldfish instantly turned into a giant dry clump in my mouth and I had to drink half a litre of water before my throat could swallow it. The closer I got to the base, the faster I ran, and the more people I passed. Arriving at the car I checked my time and realized I hadn’t actually been as slow as I thought, although I certainly didn’t keep up with the FKT in the second half. Thinking back on how many times I had refilled my water, I estimated I had drunk about 7 L, but I still felt thirsty, probably from a lack of electrolytes. I hopped in the car and immediately drove out to get some. I stopped at the first gas station and guzzled an entire bottle of Gatorade at the till while they toasted a sandwich. As I hobbled back to the car I decided that I’m done hiking or running for at least a few weeks.

## **Mt. Skook Jim: a Berry Fun Adventure to The Edge of The Stein Valley**

*Paul Ramu*

*Mt. Skook Jim: a berry fun adventure to the edge of the Stein Valley*

*August 28th - September 1st 2025*

*Stein Valley area*

*Participants: Sujin Jung, Ian Hartley, Sophia Guan, Amy Do, Paul Ramu*

**T**he Stein Valley area had been on my radar for a while, and I had seen pictures of a beautiful glacial lake at the bottom of a weird-looking mountain named Mt. Skook Jim. I figured this would be perfect for a long weekend, far from the crowds of the ferries and the touristy hiking areas. We actually only reached the edge of the Stein; most of our trip was actually in the Rogers/Kólii7 Conservancy which sits on the traditional territory of the In-SHUCK-ch Nation. Kólii7 means “high green meadows” – one couldn’t find a more appropriate name for this beautiful area.

Once the three-hour drive was complete, we loaded up on sugar with a homemade peach crumble and started hiking just past 6:00 pm Except for a short rough section at the very beginning, the trail was quite unremarkable which was great as a warm up. I did eat at least a dozen spider webs which, on the bright side, meant there wouldn’t be many people higher up, if any. Soon, the sun vanished and our headlamps were turned on. After about three hours, we were starting to get a bit sleepy and the lake never seemed to be within reach! At last, we suddenly bumped into picnic tables indicating that we had made it to the objective of the day. Tents were quickly set up, dinner was skipped by most, and into burrito mode we went.

We left camp at a reasonable time on Friday under cloudless skies and in no time the trail became very steep. The huckleberries became plentiful which definitely kept the pace slow. The boulders of the ‘Gates of Shangri-La’ gave us a taste of what was to come later on that day, but it did offer us some

delicious raspberries and (much less tasty) blackcurrants.

Lunch was had at the nearby Arrowhead Lake where the weather became concerning: nasty clouds were rolling in and thunder was rumbling in the distance. We decided we wouldn't rush into the alpine since we wouldn't want to venture onto the ridge in those conditions. Luckily, the mean clouds blew away and in less than an hour there was no sign of thunder, although we were welcomed by a light drizzle just past Heart Lake. Ian Hartley and I went up Arrowhead Peak: the short climb wasn't that exciting but we got great views of the Joffre Group and the Wedgemount area.

We hurried to catch up with the others and at that point we were on a beautiful wide ridge covered in rocks, which felt like hiking in an arctic tundra. We painfully hiked down to Cherry Pip Pass and, since weather had significantly improved and fatigue was settling in, we decided to take a snack/light dinner break there. Skihist Mountain made an appearance in the distance between Caltha Peak and Tundra Peak – it seems like you can never escape the watch of the matriarch of the Southwest BC mountains when you venture past Pemberton!

Our objective for the day was in sight but we still had to go through a long series of boulder fields which felt endless! Ian found us the perfect campsite on fine orange gravel right by Caltha Lake, which would be our home for the next two nights. Huckleberries were everywhere, and overall the amount and the diversity of berries on this trail is beyond anything else I've seen before. The berries truly added a new flavor (pun intended) to the trip: huckleberries, blackberries, blackcurrants, raspberries, thimbleberries, and salmonberries! By 8:30 pm we were all in our tents and soon fell asleep, tired but excited about the next day.

On Saturday, Sophia Guan and Amy Do decided to take the day off to rest and dilly-dally in the meadows, while Sujin Jung, Ian, and I started our trip to Mt Skook Jim around 8:00 am. A faint path around Caltha Lake led us to the lower west ridge of Caltha Peak and from there we followed cairns for the next couple of hours. The trail was very decent; we made it to Figure Eight Lake in exactly an hour where we took a breather.

Past the lake there are several small bumps to ascend and descend until we stood above a magnificent glacial lake and stared at Mt Skook Jim. This is where our problems started: Ian was not feeling great and made the hard but wise decision to go no further. The journey so far wasn't particularly technical, so we didn't feel uncomfortable having him go back to camp by himself. The other issue was that the route to the base of the mountain didn't look obvious. We had to pick between going clockwise which included a short steep section that seemed impassable, and counter-clockwise which involved a network of slabs and was our preferred option. At that point bailing became

a serious consideration as this route wasn't supposed to become a scramble and we weren't mentally prepared to do one.

Sujin and I easily lost elevation by scrambling down a chimney and arrived in a slab heaven. We knew where we needed to go and found a slab that seemed friendly at first, but it got steep and handholds disappeared. Considering there were twenty-ish meters of air below us, we backtracked. We repeated this at least three times to avoid going through upper class 4 or class 5 terrain until we found one slab with decent holds. The exposure wasn't horrible, but a fall would definitely mean a SAR call so things became a bit more serious. The moves weren't bad but I did have to clear an overhang to get into position. Sujin gave her best effort and tried hard, but she wasn't feeling it and made the very honorable decision to bail here. This section was way more technical than I had anticipated, but I am very happy and proud of the decisions we made and how we managed the risks. We never pushed too hard to the point where falling became a high possibility, and Sujin was smart enough to call it quits when things exceeded her risk tolerance. She turned around and managed to quickly catch up with Ian.

After some more slab-fun, I made it to the lake outflow and what would be the crux of the day. The water had carved its way into the rock so what I thought would be a simple creek crossing turned out to be a small gorge crossing. I managed to scramble down a series of slabs where the handholds were all solid underclings, but if my feet were to slip I couldn't have stopped myself and would have fallen a few meters into the waterfall. I didn't feel too uncomfortable so I kept going, and fairly easily crossed the creek using a partially submerged boulder. I had finally made it to the base of Skook Jim! This would be the last liquid water source until the summit so I filled up my half-liter bottle.

From that point, the route was pretty obvious: up the large slabs and then up a moraine to a small headwall. I went around it by stepping on snow, but then the only way to get back on the rock was scrambling up very loose gravel where most holds would break off. So on the way down, I opted to scramble down a diagonal crack on the headwall which was much better. Twenty-ish minutes of boulder hopping later, I was on the summit ridge starting down at an immense glacier carpeting the east side of Skook Jim and the nearby mountains.

I then ran to the summit, fueled by the excitement of finally reaching the top. The views were somewhat limited as the sky was hazy, but they were still amazing. Some concerning clouds were forming so I didn't linger and soon started running down the ridge. I 'skied' some snowy sections that looked far enough from the glacier, but getting back onto the rock was tricky due to scary moats, which were some of the deepest I've ever seen (i.e. you fall in and you're stuck forever). I was starting to overheat so I went skinny

dipping in the lake which was rejuvenating.

I crossed the creek again and, once above the slabs, I opted to skip the scary section where Sujin had to bail, I instead opted to gain more elevation than necessary by going all the way up a cliffy bump. From there I ran whenever I could as I was excited to be reunited with the team. In just under three hours after leaving the summit, I was back at camp. I felt disappointed not to be able to get anyone else on the summit especially considering I made a navigation mistake (clockwise was the way to go), but in the end I was very happy to see that everyone made the most of their day: Amy and Sophia slept in, relaxed, and swam in Caltha Lake, while Sujin and Ian hung out among the huckleberry bushes. I wasn't able to motivate anybody to go check out nearby Tundra Lake so I did the short hike alone. It truly is a gem of a lake under the distant watch of Skihist Mountain. This hike was a great way to end a great day!

We were expecting some rain on Sunday, so we were pleasantly surprised to wake up under a perfect blue sky. If there's one thing we've (re-)learned on this trip, it's that the weather forecast was completely useless so deep into the mountains! I was a bit sad to leave Caltha Lake but we were looking forward to our luxurious night at the cabin. Amy and Sophia weren't interested in scrambling so they headed to Arrowhead Lake while Sujin, Ian, and I navigated up a boulder field to the Tabletop-Anemone col where we dropped our packs. The climb to



**Above**

Caltha Lake Base camp under stormy skies *Paul Ramu*

**Below**

**Left** Unnamed glacial lake below Mt Skook Jim *Paul Ramu*

**Right** Huge glaciers carpeting the north side of Mt Skook Jim *Paul Ramu*



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Tabletop Mountain involved a couple of fun and easy scrambly moves and the views were satisfying.

Ian wasn't excited about Anemone Peak so he waited for Sujin and me at the col while we had fun doing the slightly more involved scramble up Anemone Peak. Once reunited with Ian, we decided to head straight down a wide gully towards Heart Lake, which was easier than expected thanks to an unexpected steep path. Lunch was had at Arrowhead Lake and we swam a little to celebrate what would be our last moments in the alpine. By 4:00 pm we were at the Lizzie Creek Cabin and we were pleasantly surprised to find it empty! After four to five hours of chatting and thunderstorm watching, we went to bed in our fancy abode. Sleep wasn't great due to snorers, a mouse using me as playground, and something crawling on my face a few times, but despite all of that I had no regrets staying in the cabin.

We were all coughing a little upon waking up Monday morning; being at a lower elevation, we began to feel the smoke that was sitting in the valley. The intense thunderstorm activity from the previous days had triggered several wildfires across the Lower Mainland. Keeping our standards high, we had breakfast at the table sitting on chairs and kept things slow to delay the inevitable return to 'normal life'. We wrote a few silly words in the logbook and started the blueberry-filled descent towards Lizzie Lake and the car. The descent was fairly uneventful and after minimal faff at the car we headed back to the somewhat civilized world.

I am very grateful for those who have been maintaining the trail and the cabin, and for the In-SHUCK-ch Nation for taking care of this gorgeous area. The beauty and the wildness of an adventure is only part of its success; the people you share it with are the bigger part and I am thankful for all of my teammates for remaining cheerful and not hating me even if I (once again) downplayed the difficulty of the hike!

**Left** Breakfast in front of Lizzie Lake **Right** Rejuvenating. *Paul Ramu*





# Fannin the Flames of Ambition

*Aaron Lee*

*October 3, 2025 - October 5, 2025*

*Fannin Range*

*Participants: Cameron Varcoe and Aaron Lee*

This traverse took place on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh land.

## **Pre-Preface**

**B**ushwhacking in my mind is sacred; it is a step out of our human-cultivated cave and into the living world that sustains us. At times, bushwhacking to me feels like returning home after a long absence, relieving yet foreign. But it's important to remember the forest is no longer our home; we've distanced ourselves far enough from the natural world that the average human would struggle to survive here for long. Rather, bushwhacking is an invasion of what is left of the places life calls home. We've convinced ourselves that this incursion is important to keep humanity connected with nature. I would agree, but would add it is easy to misunderstand this connection and take misguided action. The mindset I've taken into a bushwhack has caused me to question how I perceive the relationship between humans and the wild. This, in turn, prompts many more questions on what it means to be alive and human in an anthropocentric world. In short, I hold bushwhacking sacred in my mind because it causes reflection on very existential questions. Please bushwhack with a critical mind, humility, and care.

**Photo** Meslilloet and Judge Howay at Moonrise. *Aaron Lee*

### **Preface**

The way to Squamish by foot makes for an interesting puzzle to solve. Most see the line along the Howe Sound Crest, then along the Sea to Sky. Others have suggested routes awlong the Stawamus/Indian River FSR. I even saw a line going along Cathedral to Capilano Ridge (in a day!). None of these routes were in the spirit of what I had in mind; what would it be like to walk to Squamish before roads? This left me one line: Seymour to Squamish through the Fannin Range, then over Sky Pilot.

It's hard to find an "unexplored/undocumented" area in the North Shore, especially in the age of the internet. For me, it was this wild area surrounded by marks of humanity that made this route wonderful. Combined with poor documentation of the Fannin Range north of the Indian Arm and the fact that much of the planning and packing was done on Thursday (we left Friday), this trip was a leap into a sea of unknowns. There was much room for spontaneity, surprises, and a magical spirit of "FAFO". By leaving this route only documented in this journal, I hope others can discover the Fannin Range while still experiencing the same wonder I experienced.

The following is a brain dump play-by-play of the events that unfolded. Hopefully, it gives readers a sense of the area and convinces them to explore the Fannin Range. Sorry for not composing it better. I decided to write this up two days before journal submissions were due.

### **FRIDAY**

Mt. Seymour start at 10:00 am. Quick rip up Pump Peak face. Views are somewhat still clear. Miss turn-off at the base of Mt. Seymour and accidentally summited. Cliffs on all sides, must backtrack. Stopped on Seymour's NW ridge for lunch. Already feeling tired. Cameron is feeling the blisters from his Golden Ears already... Many ups & downs going toward Elsay as we cross drainage chutes. The trail is generally clear and well-marked. Super cloudy though, effectively in cloud. Super disorienting spatially and temporally.

Vicar Lakes flooded their banks and the trail. Some romping to get around it. Mt. Bishop is a cool rocky summit that is probably beautiful in the sun. Also kind of an accidental summit, as the turn-off was very unclear. Trail decays to remnants after Presbyter Peak. Hard to find the sharp pinpoint turn down to Fannin Lake. Trail got further lost in the boulder fields and slab as we descended the ridge.

It gets dark at this point. Hoping the forest allows easy passage to camp on Mt. Dickens. Somewhat disappointed we won't be reaching Mt. Bivouac, but closer reflection notes this goal was wildly unrealistic. The trail has been clear up to now, but the elevation gain has made fast progress difficult.

The trail all but disappears in the short trees and darkness. There

must have been either a rockslide or clear-cut logging to make the forest this horrendously dense. We find snippets of the trail and the occasional trail marker. Tried our best to follow the trail. Efforts seem unrewarded, and we opt to just take the path of least resistance downhill.

Several sections down to Fannin Lake were seriously cliffy. By the grace of gravity, we flowed downhill to where there were ropes installed to help negotiate the cliffs. Forest starts to open up, but the underbrush is still dense enough to make pathfinding/trailfinding hard.

Slope gradient mellows out, we reached Fannin Lake at ~11:00 pm and found a perfectly tent-shaped clearing in the bush to sleep in. Conveniently next to a creek. Spent one hour trying to set up a bear hang. Warm food is good. We are pretty soaked as the bush is still wet after some recent rain.

## **SATURDAY**

Aimed to wake at ~6:00 am to move by sunrise at 7:00 am. Slow to rise, eat, and pack up. Started moving in earnest around 8:00 am. The sun showed its face as we ascended the ridge to Mt. Dickens! Filled me with so much joy and energy. The sun decided to disappear 30 minutes later. Trail, or rather, footbed up Mt. Dickens, was easier to find. Maybe going uphill meant we could see it better (going downhill means all the branches in your face obscure it). Also, maybe because we could actually see in daylight.

Reached where the map shows the trail turning off down into the Indian Arm. Pleasantly surprised to see trail markers continuing north. Trailbed existed on and off until the saddle just before ascent to Eldee SE3. Along the way were some ropes to help negotiate cliffy, steep sections. I could have also sworn I saw some fresh boot prints (maybe? seemed less than three? days old) along the trail. We ate lunch on a rock overlooking a wall of clouds. Naan is really tasty, but Cameron seems less convinced. The jar of peanut butter is also starting to shine.

Following our planned route along the ridge, we get cliffed out for the first time (today). We backtracked some and followed downward-flowing ramps into a re-entrant. Descended a beautiful creek gully to the saddle before the Eldee SE3 ascent. Generally pretty beautiful, open, non-cliffy terrain on the ridge up to now.

Got our first taste of “orange-red” slope-angle shading as marked on CalTopo on our ascent of Eldee SE3. We get concerned seeing swaths of red and purple on the descent off Eldee SE3 and on the ascent of Eldee’s long south ridge. We could already see that the ascent along our planned route was massively cliffy and unfeasible. Following experience, and the less scary slope-angle shading, we opted to descend Eldee SE3 via a drainage chute. The upper section had good vegetation, allowing for a controlled descent. The lower section was rocky enough for us to scamper around.

Some hesitation on whether we should contour to the saddle once past the teep sections. A short jaunt into the forest reminded us that side-hilling on less-steep-but-still-fricking-steep terrain through dense veg is very slow. We follow the creek to the end. The bottom of the creek was nice and open and allowed a clear view of our cliffy-as-planned descent route. Following the drainage was the right move.

Seeing that our planned ascent route was impossible, we pivoted to cut north and follow a creek up to the top of the ridge. After the only section of spiky plants (salmonberry and some devil's club) on this entire traverse (!!!), the terrain rapidly became very steep. A descent into the creek we were aiming for would have been mildly sketchy and cost us a lot of elevation. In hindsight, maybe staying lower or even descending 100 m from the saddle would have helped us gain this creek more easily and kept us in less steep terrain.

The terrain only got steeper, and we ran into unclimbable cliff bands. With helmets on, we skirt around the bottoms of cliffs to find any section with enough vegetation/features for us to climb. Some sketchy and unpleasant root scrambling ensued. At some point, we got a good view of the creek we hoped to ascend in. The creek cliffed out at some points in gentle waterfalls, at others it seemed like a steep, wet 5.6 slab. Gaining Eldee's south ridge definitely is one of this route's major cruxes.

Slow progress given all the cliff-dodging took us into the night. When the headlamps came out, things were looking pretty dire. We were maybe halfway up to the ridge, and there lay an untold/unknown amount of cliffs above us. When darkness falls, Cameron and I somehow always seem to be in really nasty terrain....

Seeing that we couldn't see, we went straight up. We would go slower, but it wasn't like we were in a hurry or would see better by going faster. Occasionally, the forest would clear up enough to allow some route finding (with major guesswork and heavy squinting). The cliffs kind of followed a trend. They were impassable rocky faces with somewhat-passable steep edges, or breaks in the face that allow scrambling. Atop the cliffs would be a plateau of sorts where we could regather our bearings and pick a line up/around the next cliff.

After putting a couple of cliff bands below us, we found a plateau that stuck around. We followed some swampy areas to a web of creekllets that led us up to the ridge. The clouds had begun parting with the piercing cold wind. Scampering up the slippery moonlit heather brought welcome reprieve and peace-of-mind. Around 8:00 pm, we rested on a rocky outcrop by a tarn. We replenished our water and cooked up some BACON and couscous. All the while, we shivered in the wind. Today was much wetter than yesterday; there was more bush hugging. But BACON! Simple ridge walk in open heather fields

to Eldee from there.

Summiting Eldee was not straightforward as the peak was protected by rings of cliffs. We found our way through them with minimal climbing, though not without making a couple of wrong turns and some backtracking. On the summit of Eldee, we could see that the route down was cliffier than expected. We opted to save this fun for when we could see again.

Good moonlit view of the mountains and a glimpse of Vancouver's lights as we set up camp, ate more bacon, and hung our food off a cliff.

## **SUNDAY**

Frozen boots and frosty socks in the morning, but there was a glorious sunrise! Stoked on this and cold bacon, we broke fast and tore down camp in record time. We succeeded in moving just as the sun broke the horizon. Ramp skidding down Eldee's rings of cliffs was pretty fun. Stoked on dry, sunny conditions. This excitement seemed to reactivate my bowels.

The infamous Bivouac Mountain looked barricaded. Its south face was a wall, the ridge we followed would take us up and down a cliffy bump. Then, we'd find a crack in the wall to ascend. Contemplated dropping into the basin at the base and following what looked like a ramp. Postponed this decision till we get closer.

As we got closer, the ramp became less appealing as we would lose significant elevation in dense forest to gain the hypothetical base of the ramp. We were forced straight up cliffs as they wrapped around the sides of our ridge. Some good fun scrambling, though the consequences of a fall were bad (a thought that strangely didn't cross my mind in the moment).

Crested the cliffy bump and was elated to see a steep forested funnel up into some couloirs. No more cliff-dancing! Had some time to take stock of our food and distance situation. At the time of writing, I don't remember exactly how much food we had left. I just remember we could either push forward, risk getting shut down and being forced to turn around or bail, and maybe starve a little. Or we could back-track, face the horrendously cliffy terrain of days past, and also maybe starve a little less.

We chose to push forward, seeing several decent bailing options. If continuing as planned (exit via Sky Pilot), we expected a Monday night end date, meaning one day with little food. Seeing it took ~3 hours to move less than 3 km, Sky Pilot was risky. We saw lots of cliffy terrain ahead that may take even longer to negotiate. Our bailing options included the Stawamus/Indian River FSR to Indian Arm or Squamish, the Seymour Lake access road to Vancouver, Furry Creek FSR to Furry Creek, and Britannia Creek FSR to Britannia Beach. Which option we took depended on today's progress.

Following the forested funnel made for solid progress. We seemed to gravitate (naturally) toward the cliffs and found ourselves scampering up



**Top left**

Look how far we've gone! Look at that beauty of an alpine ridge!

*Aaron Lee*



**Top right**

L to R, Sky Pilot bloc, Bagpipe, Haggis (cliffs that require an acquired taste to enjoy), Fife. As seen from Jukes S2.

*Aaron Lee*

**Middle**

Dreamy North Shore weather and terrain west of the Indian Arm.

*Aaron Lee*



**Bottom left**

The vertical bushwhack continues...

*Aaron Lee*

some cliffs assisted by tenuous veggie handholds. The bowl formed by Bivouac and Jukes S2 with the Forestry Lakes below is quite pretty. Relieved and stoked to be here. Ahead lies a cruisy alpine ridge run to Mt. Jukes.

Some sections seem to have a trailbed or some animal highway through the gorgeous heather to Jukes S2. Jukes S2 was steep, but nothing compared to the near-vertical stuff we wrestled with in days past. The ridge past Jukes S2 holds more beautiful, open heather fields. Found a section where a band of bright yellow grass lay between swaths of green heather. The grass followed trickles of water between dried-up tarn-beds. Looked like the yellow-brick road in my head.

Ridge becomes rocky and slabby granite. Great visibility to see all the mountains around us. Since this morning, we could see Sky Pilot get closer and closer. Behind us, we could see the ridge we had rambled all day. Perhaps we'll make it after all? Truly beautiful, open, alpine meadows all the way up to Mt. Jukes itself. My personal all-time favourite ridge walk so far. We summit Mt. Jukes around 5:00 pm. Saw a mama bear and her two cubs just below the summit block.

Mt. Jukes summit provided a good view of our path ahead. Fife, Haggis, and Baggpipe lay immediately in front of us and were clearly quite cliffy and technical. If we forged on today, we would thrash through the fresh cutblock between Jukes and Fife and likely end up clawing through unappetizing cliffs on Fife in the dark and us sleeping atop Fife. This would leave a journey from Fife to Sky Pilot all for Monday, which likely meant we would be scrambling up Class 4-5 terrain in a race against darkness or entirely at night. These were risks we didn't want to take.

We decided to cut our losses and camp on Jukes. Tomorrow (Monday), we will descend into the saddle between Jukes and Fife and follow the water down to the Stawamus/Indian River FSR. We'd then follow the road to Squamish. I was bummed, but this was the responsible thing to do.

We feasted that night. Finished the couscous, the carrots, the tomatoes (which were surprisingly not mush), and the jar of peanut butter (the gift that kept on giving). We watched a beautiful sunset and went to sleep nice and early.

What made Mt. Jukes special was the fact that I could recognize many surrounding peaks and knew stories about them. Could see Mt. Bonnycastle, which brought many good memories to mind. Meslilloet and its glacier were glowing in sunset colours. Nch'kay and Mamquam loomed in the distance, Robie Reid and Judge Howay broke the horizon as the moon rose. Beauty.

## **MONDAY**

There's a helicopter flying around. It sounds kinda close. Who would be flying

around here at 2:00 am? Probably industry, there's construction in the valley bottom after all.

I propped up my boots outside in hopes they would dry. They did! The dry cold wind left my boots and socks bone-dry. My stoke was at an all-time high, and I no longer felt sad about our decision to bail. Cameron had cold, wet boots still =(

We broke fast and packed camp with conviction and started moving around 7:00 am. Golden sunlight greeted us as we slid with grace down Jukes' heathered slopes. An hour into our descent, the quiet sky is torn apart by the thunderous beat of wings. Out of nowhere\*, a giant whirlybird dropped out of the blue and snatched up Cameron and me in its talons. We helplessly dangled as we ripped through the air at 250 kph until the bird eventually dropped us off at the Squamish Airport. It was a quiet, awkward, confusing drive home from there.

\*We knew it was coming. For now, I'll say people got concerned about our foodlessness and sent a bird of prey after us. Nods to Squamish SAR for fishing us out of the bush.

### **Postface**

Going into this traverse, I had a feeling this was a "bad" idea. The statistics seemed brutal (~6700 m over 64 km in 2-3 days), the terrain seemed unforgiving, West Coast forests are known for brutal bushwhacking, unclear chances of success... Even in hindsight, I am apprehensive about repeating this traverse. But in writing this trip report and thinking more deeply on what I sought from this walk in the forest, my resolve to return only grew.

I've realized much of the bushwhacking I've done is secondary to the objective. Last year, Mt. Bonnycastle was the goal, and the bushwhack was an obstacle between me and the summit. This year, the goal was to walk to Squamish with minimal use of infrastructure. As such, I prepared to push the objective in two days of brutal bushwhacking (30 km and 3000 m gain per day), and it proved unpleasant and unrealistic. As I gradually accepted slower progress, I began to appreciate the bushwhack for the time spent fully immersed in the woods. There was no thought of bailing, only tranquillity and a resolve to face whatever lay ahead.

It feels untrue to say I enjoy nature when my time spent in nature is directed toward achieving objectives created by human society (summitting Nch'kay/Garibaldi, skiing Kulshan/Baker, doing the Fannin Range Traverse are all ideas conjured by the human mind and bear no meaning to the rest of the living world). I'm looking forward to making this trip again, except with a different mindset. I'll also have a heap of questions to bring along, and hopefully a heap of food to accompany it.

# The Quest for the Panorama

*Tobias Jäggi*

*30 September*

*Panorama Ridge*

*Participants: Filipa Fay Moreira, Lucas Fleet, Hailey Defieux, Sydney Van Ginhoven, Jay Jurado Belamide, Judith Ko, Sunny Das, Ciara Rossiter, Clara Chamaa, Nicholas Boel-Kjær, Hunter Bowie, Nicolas Olsa, Jonas Kirschmann, Jonas Dalsgaard, Eliot Patton, Sergio Lopez, Shogo Kawakita, Jillian Heidecker, Cameron Ng, Phoebe Richardson, Rodrigo Lozano Galecio, Louis Ahn, Jeppe Birkelund Jersild, Sojung Kwon, Aoi Yamazaki, Julia Cranston, Katie Mullally, Alex Pitchford, William Franklin*

The rain started long before the alarm did, soft and steady like a warning. By the time 4:30 am rolled around, my roof sounded like a snare drum, and all I wanted was to stay under the covers and pretend the mountain could climb itself. But there was no time for self-pity as soon after, the headlights of a dark car with bright blue bike racks appeared at my porch.

Cosiness was quickly rediscovered in the tightly packed backseats of the Toyota Prius as it rolled through the empty streets of downtown Vancouver, heading north toward the mountains. Everyone was in good spirits, fueled by that pre-dawn optimism hikers mistake for courage.

After a quick breakfast stop in Squamish, we drove the last stretch up to Rubble Creek to meet the rest of the brave souls who'd ignored the weather forecast. A short welcome and pep talk from Jay Belamide, and we were off with Jay setting a pace that could only be described as somewhat "motivationally discouraging".

No more than two hours later, the group arrived at the Taylor Meadows Campsite, where we caught our breath, refueled and prepared for the main part of the journey – the hike up to Panorama Ridge. With all of us still

trying to keep up with Jay's relentless pace, we continued the trip by wandering over long boardwalks through beautiful meadows painted in every shade of autumn. Suddenly, the group came to a standstill, initiated by a subtle "Hey bear". Just a few meters away, a very curious young black bear stared at us with the same look I give people blocking the sidewalk. Luckily, its attention span rivalled that of a Gen Z kid lost in an Instagram reel scroll hole, and we moved on.

Arriving at the start of the actual ridge, we got greeted by some very enthusiastic trail runners who described the view as "ping-pong ball", as to which, to this day, I am unsure what is meant by it, and told us that snowfall would await us at the top. We thanked them, because apparently that's what hikers do when someone tells you it's going to get worse.

By 11:30 am, we'd made the top. Fog so thick you could taste it, bone-chilling wind that cut through every layer of clothing, onsetting snowfall and not a single sign of the famous panorama. Jay checked the weather forecast and predicted the view would clear up by around 2.30 pm. It soon dawned upon every single one of us that waiting it out is infeasible and that we would just have to accept defeat.

Little did we know that, as soon as we started packing up with a slight undertone of disappointment, the weather gods decided to reward us with a little treat. Within about 30 seconds, overlaid by loud cheering, the fog cleared up. What had been a blank canvas turned into a painting with Garibaldi Lake glowing in that impossible glacier blue, bedded between towering mountain peaks. It almost felt like the mountain saying, "Alright, you've earned it".

After the photo frenzy and a quick group shot that resembled a high-school yearbook cover, we began the descent with the goal of checking off the last bucket list item for the day: swimming.

Jay Belamide, Alex Pitchford, Phoebe Richardson, and I pushed ahead and, after reaching the Taylor Meadows campsite, started waiting for the followers, which we expected to arrive shortly. 15 minutes passed. Nobody came. Then we realized the trail forked earlier. Oops. Aiming at catching up with the group, we started bolting down the trail to the lake. After a short radio call with Imogen Hayes, who confirmed that the rest of the group had long reached the destination and was already chilling lakeside, we decided not to pursue them further but just go for a swim at our current location. Under grimaces of pain, we plunged into the freezing cold, Gatorade-blue glacial water of Garibaldi Lake. Contrary to modern-day beliefs, we quickly agreed that cold plunges are a scam. What followed was us, wrestling our damp, cold bodies back into clammy clothes, a dance no one looked good doing. Attempting to bring our bodies back to normal operating temperature, Jay radioed the rest of the group, checking in on them and letting them know that we will start the



**Top left**  
Hiking through the  
Garibaldi meadows  
*Taeyong Ahn*

**Top right**  
Young black bear near the  
Taylor Meadows Campsite  
*Tobias Jaeggi*



**Middle**  
Foggy Panorama Ridge  
views  
*Sonali Das*



**Bottom Left**  
Well-earned views on top  
of Panorama Ridge  
*Imogen Hayes*

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long trudge down.

The way back marked the point in time when the most constructive conversations emerged. Jay ranted about his hatred for the city of Vancouver and his love for cherry-flavoured beer, and the Brits complained about the city's weak drinking culture. Someone posed the very serious question of what would be the ideal drinks to be able to pour out of our fingers. Further conversations led to a tirade against Canadian dairy products, with cheddar cheese being described as "bright, orange, fluorescent brick of s\*\*\*\*" and, as notoriously neutral as a Swiss person can be, I have to admit that there is some truth to this.

Eventually, the conversations died down, replaced by the rhythmic sound of boots on the trail and the silent wish that each switchback might finally reveal the car park. When it did, we all exhaled the same wordless kind of joy. Shortly after, the rest of the group arrived, and the trailhead was full of happy, tired faces. 33 km, 1700 m of elevation, and 7 hours and 40 minutes later, we regrouped into our cars and headed back to Vancouver.

Turns out, all it takes to fix constant student stress is 33 kilometers, a near-hypothermic swim, and a forecast that lied in our favour. Maybe that's the thing about the mountains. They don't care how early you wake up or how far you climb. But every now and then, they lift the fog just long enough to remind you why you came.

**Photo** Garibaldi Lake shortly before diving in *Hailey Defieux*



# A Misty Whimsy Garibaldi Hike

*Eden Breker*

*September 30, 2025*

*Garibaldi Lake*

*Elizabeth Chu, Eden Breker, Anya Jones, Michael Lu, Lily Yang, Crystal Yim, Logan Vaughn*

**G**aribaldi Lake is a magical place in the Garibaldi Provincial Park mountains that has been extensively featured in BC postcards, advertisements, and Nute-lla jars. It has this wicked icy blue colour that suggests Mako-Mermaid type magic will occur there every full moon, hence this trip's mission: Garibaldi Lake Mermaid Photoshoot.

The trip was organized by Elizabeth Chu, who had acquired the mermaid tail and dreamt up the whole adventure. At 6:00 am on the last Saturday of September, we piled into an Evo and zoomed off.

It was a perfectly gloomy day at the base of the trail. The exact twilight-filter-esque atmosphere you'd expect from the first weekend of Vancouver fall. Blessedly, our crew was anything but gloomy. As a relatively unseasoned hiker, I experienced bits of the usual mid-vertical-hike crashout. You know, the point where you long for a mall escalator to magically appear and wonder if you'd get to ride in a helicopter if you accidentally hurled yourself down the hill and broke something, but then someone would slow down for a second, look back (I was at the back, again, relatively unseasoned), ask a question, so you keep moving and you keep up and it's suddenly the most fun you've ever had.

Then we got to the lake! Garibaldi was truly stunning. A very good body of water indeed. Those of us with dreams of whimsy and nerves of steel got changed and hopped into the water, and BOOM, Mako magic.



As someone who shivers at the slightest breeze, I was happy to vicariously experience the magic from beneath two sweaters and a rain jacket. The commitment to the bit was truly admirable.

This trip was a beautiful start to the fall season and made me fall in love with hiking all over again. Any opportunity you get to bring a little extra whimsy into your world, especially with a wonderful group of outdoorsy adventurers, I strongly advise you to take.



*Photos by Eden Breker*

# Observation Mountain: A Kluane Classic

*Zachary Wirth*

The Ä'äy Chù West is the most popular overnight trip in Kluane National Park and Reserve – and for good reason. The trail travels 22 km up the Ä'äy Chù Valley from the Alaska Highway to the Canada Creek campground at the foot of Observation Mountain (Ä'äy). On the second day of the typical three-day itinerary, most hikers will cross Canada Creek and summit Observation Mountain to view the converging arms of the massive Kaskawulsh Glacier, and then return to camp the same evening.

For the last three summers, I have worked in Kluane, but somehow never managed to make it up to the summit. This year, in my fourth summer, I decided that I had to make it happen, one way or another. The one problem is that I only get two-day weekends. After watching the satellite imagery for a few weeks, my coworker Lionel and I decided to give it a shot on the June 2-3 “weekend,” when the snow had mostly melted off the 2,100-metre-high summit. To get the most ‘value’ out of the trip, we planned to hike down to the glacier to explore for a bit, then continue down through a deep canyon back to Canada Creek – completing somewhat of a loop around Observation Mountain.

After a 45-minute drive from Haines Junction, we started hiking at around 10:00 am. The trail starts off pretty cruisy on what was, at one point, the original Alaska Highway built in 1942. After a few kilometres, the trail crosses Sheep Creek – a straightforward creek crossing even at the worst of times. It then winds over a small stretch of boardwalk across the Coin Creek marsh. The kilometres quickly ticked by as we crossed the then-very-low Bul-lion Creek and continued down the valley, staring up at summits rising 1,500 m directly above us and contemplating possible ascent routes. Though there aren't really any records to go off of, I wouldn't be surprised if some of them were unclimbed despite the relative ease of access.

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We stuck to the trail climbing up over the little knoll just before Canada Creek and were treated to an incredible view of the imposing north face of Mount Maxwell looming over the toe of the Kaskawulsh Glacier. We hit the campground about four hours into our hike and continued across Canada Creek's massive alluvial fan. Crossing Canada Creek was fairly trivial – I was able to do it barefoot, a technique that's generally frowned upon here in the Yukon since the silty creeks often have boulders tumbling through fast-flowing water. Canada Creek has been known to sweep people off their feet and has been the site of many near-drownings and rescues over the years.

Once across Canada Creek, we followed it up the valley, watching the walls constrict and get ever taller. At the confluence with Columbia Creek, we veered left and followed it until we reached the start of the climb up to the plateau. At one point, the route used to be fairly obvious, but the lower section had washed out, rendering it difficult to follow. Last August, Lionel made this exact mistake, so we were more careful this time. After already hiking 28 km, the 1,100 m of elevation gain over 3.5 km to the summit certainly hurt.

The satellite imagery turned out to be correct (why wouldn't it?), and we only had a few small isothermal snow patches to cross before gaining the southern aspect of the ridge. We started to see the Kaskawulsh Glacier across the plateau – more than 5 km wide and over 1,000 m below us. We summited in perfect weather at about 6:00 pm and spent a good 45 minutes soaking in the view.

To the south, dozens of summits rose at least 1,500 m above the glacier's surface, each with their own glaciers, which – while looking small in this immense landscape – would be massive elsewhere, cascading down from peak to valley bottom. The depth and scale of these valleys reminded us of the incredible power of glaciers in shaping the landscape, and that what we see today is just a vestige of what covered much of Canada 15,000 years ago. Across four or five mountain ranges, the triple peak of Mounts Hubbard, Alverstone,

**Left** Crossing the Bullion Creek alluvial fan at low water levels. *Zachary Wirth*  
**Right** Making our way up Canada Creek towards the confluence with Columbia Creek (left). *Zachary Wirth*  
**Next Page** Chilling on a glacial table *Zachary Wirth*



and Kennedy could be seen, reminding us once again that giants lurk beyond these relatively small front-range mountains.

To the east, we could see the Kaskawulsh River flowing out of the glacier towards the Alsek River – defying all odds in forging a route straight through the mountains into the Gulf of Alaska.

To the north, the Á'äy Chù crosses the Alaska Highway and drains into Kluane Lake, the largest lake within the Yukon and whose salmon-bearing rivers flow out to the Yukon River and into the Bering Strait.

Finally, we dropped off the summit to the southwest onto the plateau and wandered around, trying to find a somewhat flat – and ideally fairly dry – spot to camp.

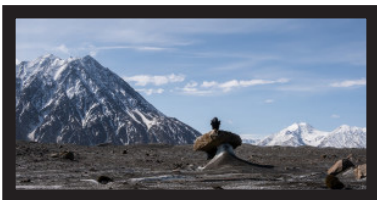
In the morning, we got up slowly and packed up to make our way down onto the glacier. We picked a steep ridge and descended 600 m into the valley. Climbing over the horrendously loose lateral moraine, we looked for a spot to climb onto the glacier. We found a decent spot near a few small glacial lakes and scrambled up the mud-covered ice. Once on the surface, we walked out across the endless expanse of ice, marvelling at the many supraglacial streams, moulins, and impressively large medial moraines. Starting to run out of time – and conscious of the still 30 km hike back to the trailhead – we turned around after 2 km (and only 40% of its width) and looked for another way off the ice.

Once off the glacier, we climbed back up the moraine towards the head of the canyon more than 100 m above the glacier. It was interesting to think that the glacier used to come up this high – and that a meltwater stream likely carved the deep canyon. After some sketchy downclimbing through the canyon, we decided to bail out of it and luckily found a really nice goat/sheep/bear trail just above, which we followed down to the old lakeshore at the toe of the Kaskawulsh Glacier.

Walking along the muddy valley floor, we realized that we were standing on the pre-2016 lakebed. In May 2016, the ice dam at the toe of the Kaskawulsh Glacier ruptured, and the Kaskawulsh River captured most of the flow of the Á'äy Chù – effectively drying out the Á'äy Chù Valley and dropping the water level of Kluane Lake by almost four metres over the course of a few days. Since then, the valley has become plagued by Mad Max- or Dune-like dust storms.

Anyway, at this point, we were looking at a 25 km slog back to the trailhead. And a slog it was. On the way back, we decided to walk back through the dry river flats and were hit with a dust storm of biblical scale. I won't go too deep into the details – the slog was mind-numbing, and the wind that battered us was relentless.

I see why this trip is as popular as it is. However, despite its popularity, over the two days, we didn't run into a single other



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person. Yeah, it was early June and mid-week, but this has been my experience hiking and paddling here in Kluane over three and a half summers now. It truly is some of the best hiking and backpacking in Canada (if not the entire world), and I feel like I've barely scratched the surface. The hiking is hard; trails are few or nonexistent, bridges certainly don't exist, the valleys are huge, the rivers are equally big, the passes are steep, and the glaciers are the largest outside of Antarctica and Greenland. Oh – and it also happens to be home to nearly all of the tallest mountains in Canada.

I would like to thank the Champagne and Aishihik, Kluane, and White River First Nations for the use of their traditional lands.



*Top to bottom*

**1**  
Descending the ridge  
to the glacier.  
*Zachary Wirth*



**2**  
Descending the  
sheep/goat/bear trail  
above the canyon.  
*Zachary Wirth*

# PEDALS AND PADDLES



# Hitting Rock Bottom on the Capilano

*Elizabeth Chu and James Kissane*

*November 16, 2025*

*Capilano River, North Vancouver*

*Participants: Elizabeth Chu, James Kissane, anonymous third paddler (Shane)*

## **Elizabeth's POV**

The following is a recounting of my (Elizabeth) first attempt at paddling Class III whitewater and how I quickly bailed on the Capilano River. Our third kayak partner's name has been anonymized and I'll warn that this one involves an accident with a bit of gore.

For some background: at the time of writing I'm less than a year out of an ACL and meniscus reconstruction surgery and have been hesitant to try skiing again, so I've been looking for a new local sport that I could continue throughout the winter. After taking the Intro to Whitewater course with River Culture Kayaking in September, running a few more Class II rivers, and having an extensive sea kayaking background, I was finding myself becoming fairly comfortable maneuvering through Class II waters.

I had asked James Kissane to go paddling on the weekend after reading break, he was down, but we needed to find another car. For context, most rivers require two cars for shuttling boats and humans between the river put-in and takeout. I reached out to the Vancouver Whitewater Club chats and received a response from someone named Shane. Shane, like me, had also never paddled the Capilano. He also spoke an extremely small amount of English, but seemed to be more skilled at paddling whitewater than me.

James and I met up with Shane at 11:00 am at the original take out,

**Section cover** Sri Chaitanya

but low water levels meant we needed to drive further up river to the Capilano Rugby Club to leave James' car at the half lap takeout. Piling into Shane's car, we drove to the put-in at the Capilano Fish Hatchery and were ready to start paddling around 12:00 pm. Ignoring the 'DANGER DO NOT ENTER' sign, I climbed over the fence looking down nervously at the first rapid. Shane and I opted to drag our boats over the rocks below the rapid to put in there.

On my first rapid I flipped, had absolutely no luck with my roll, and swam. Here the river bank was made up of chunky gravel beaches dotted with people fishing. I swam to the gravel bar, walked my way down the beach, signaled I was okay, then swam the rest of the way to the eddy where James and Shane were waiting with my boat. As I resituated myself in the boat I took in the surroundings. The sides of the river had transitioned to tall rock faces speckled with moss. Mist surrounded the trees atop the riverbank. The scene was beautiful and lush—classically Pacific Northwest. The water was calm here but the river horizon staunchly ended, indicating the next set of rapids.

On this rapid I flipped again, tried to roll, and got semi-upright, but picked my head up too fast (carping), and consequently got sent back underwater. Deciding to remain in my boat and try for a T-rescue rather than immediately swimming, I moved my hands to the side of my boat to begin swiping. I was barely through one swipe of the side of my boat when I felt my upper two teeth crack on impact and my head swing back. Immediately abandoning the idea of being underwater, my hands pivoted to pull my skirt as I kicked my way out of the boat determined to find the air. (If you're curious about the feeling, grind your teeth around on a mouthful of rocks while getting someone to waterboard you and punch you in the face.) When I popped up I gave James and Shane a grimace frantically shouting something along the lines of, "I'm missing my teeth!" I was in shock so the actualities are a bit blurred, but I ended up in the eddy and in a panicked state, expressed that I didn't want to do this anymore and asked if there was a bail out option.

I held on to the back of James' boat as he gave me a tow. I had no idea what the riverbank was like downstream, so as I transitioned between soothing my swollen face in the cold water and picking my head up to spit out blood, I looked at the passing rock faces thinking to myself 'Yeah, I could climb that'. I was determined to get out of the river. We reached the next gravel bar where I stood on the shore for a bit just looking down at the water. I was still in shock trying to process what happened when James returned with my boat and Shane.

There were two anglers on the gravel bar. One of them, Brent, showed Shane the way up the fishing trails to the parking lot where he could park his car to pick me up. The other, Caroline, happened to be a nurse. While wiping some of the blood off my face, she quickly assessed me for a traumatic brain injury and told me I might need stitches for the cut on my lip and

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forehead, but she didn't think my nose was broken. The jagged feeling of my leftover teeth on my tongue distracted me from realizing all the damages to my face. I had assumed the blood was coming from the inside of my mouth, so the cuts and swollen nose were news to me. Caroline told us how to find information on the ER and we got a move on up the trail. Catching up with Brent and Shane at the trailhead, we thanked Brent for his helpfulness before he returned to fishing. I figured I would become cold waiting around for Shane to walk back to the put-in and then drive back to pick me up, so we all walked back to the fish hatchery. The air was cold on my exposed teeth—think of the feeling of biting into ice cream and immediately developing a brain freeze, but constant. I felt the need to keep talking to keep my spirits up, so I continued yapping though my newfound lisp and cold teeth.

We drove back to James' car then made a beeline for the Lion's Gate ER. I checked in, changed out of my dripping wet gear, and began the wait to see a doctor. The wait time listed was three hours so I encouraged James to rescue the boats before dark. I was called back fairly quickly where I iced my lip, received a tetanus shot, some local anesthetic for three stitches on the bottom left corner of my lip and three just below the tail of my opposite eyebrow. When the doctor palpated my nose I realized how painful it was. It was straight on my face, but too swollen to further assess for a break. I was discharged with instructions to buy dental wax for my teeth as no dentists were open on the weekend.

On Monday the dentist told me my gums were too damaged to do any work, but they scheduled me for emergency dental work on Thursday. The next few days consisted of medium temperature mushy foods, icing my face, and hiding in my room until I had teeth. On Friday, I got my stitches out, reunited with the outside world, and showed off the black eye I had developed.

I had a hefty amount of time to reflect over the week, an injury classic. I'll keep the sappy stuff for my own journal, but some should be shared. While things could have gone differently, when they did go bad, they went well—everyone reacted level-headedly and the recovery was smooth—I'm thankful for that. Just two weeks have passed since it happened, I still love the water, and I have already gone out (sea) kayaking again. So in defense of whitewater kayaking, accidents happen, and while they are scary, scars heal. If my knee surgery didn't stop you from skiing, you shouldn't let this trip report discourage you from trying or continuing whitewater kayaking. It's fun and rewarding, and great if you're seeking out adrenaline. Tell your people you love them, pass around some hugs, and happy paddling. :)

### James's POV

The following is another account of what you just read from my (James's)

perspective.

I'd paddled with Elizabeth a few times, and she had proved herself comfortable and competent on the Cheakamus (Paradise Valley), the Mquam, and the Seymour, all Class II rivers. She also knew how to roll from sea kayaking and had hit a good number of combat rolls. I figured that the time was right for her to test her skills on some harder water.

The Capilano river is likely the best Class III river in British Columbia. It starts in North Vancouver and carves its way through an impressive granite canyon before reaching the ocean. The Cap is often described as being "drop-pool"; the rapids are short and end in a large calm pool before the next rapid begins. This makes it a great first Class III river for beginners. If you flip in the rapid you and your gear won't travel far. So when Elizabeth asked to paddle on Sunday, I figured the Capilano, which was at a very low flow (25 m<sup>3</sup>/s), would be perfect.

Unfortunately my usual paddling crew wasn't available that day, but Elizabeth had found a guy (Shane) through the Vancouver Whitewater Club Facebook who seemed competent but apparently spoke poor English. When we pull up to the takeout (rugby club) I learn two things. First, he spoke no English. Second, he had never been on the Capilano River. Now hindsight is 20/20, and looking back it's very obvious that at this point I should have said no, and not put on to the river. That being said, Shane claims to be comfortable on Class III, and he has the gear to suggest he was comfortable with whitewater rescue. I tell myself it will be fine, and we load our gear and bodies into his van. (Side note, this guy had four (4!) separate phone mounts on his dashboard?!).

The Capilano River was the first Class III river I ever did, so taking Elizabeth (and Shane) down it for her (their) first time felt great. It's good to remember how much progress you've made. It's also good to remember what you felt when you first started. I vividly remember shitting bricks my first time down this river, and I figure Elizabeth was feeling the same way now. In an effort to keep nerves down I try giving a little pep talk. The main thing I say is this: "The Cap is the safest Class III river you will ever paddle."

Shane's van pulls up to the put-in at the fish hatchery. We pull out the boats, suit up, and walk down to the river bank. I hit the seal launch at the top and run the very short warm up rapid before pulling into an eddy just underneath a bridge. As Elizabeth and Shane get into their boats I make sure to wave to the crowd of people filming from the bridge. It's good to show appreciation for your fans.

The first rapid is, unfortunately, the biggest. A wave train starts on the river right before it runs head on into a giant house-sized rock, aptly named House Rock. House Rock splits the river into two channels. When the channels recombine, the waves get bigger before ending in a swirling pool.

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The simplest line is to follow the majority of the flow to the right of House Rock and paddle straight into the pool at the bottom. If you want some style points you can catch some small eddies or hit some small boofs to impress the judges (fishermen on the shore). I head down first, followed by Elizabeth, followed by Shane. I tell them to keep close to me, and I try and spin around as frequently as I can in order to check on them. Just as I pass House Rock I notice the distance between Elizabeth and I is growing, so I pull into a mid river eddy to wait. As soon as I do that, I see Elizabeth has flipped. Unfortunately she was right in the middle of the biggest waves, so it was a very difficult spot to roll, and she swims. I go for the interception and can see that she is okay. I tell her to swim for shore and to stick with Shane. As they paddle/swim into an eddy I chase the boat downstream and awkwardly corral it into the pool at the bottom. Shane, not understanding he was supposed to stay with Elizabeth (see that language barrier), paddles down to join me. That's okay though, since it means he can empty the boat while I get Elizabeth. I paddle to where I can shout to her, and motion with my hands that she needs to swim for it. Fortunately, it's not a long swim, and we reunite her with the boat.

The second rapid is the second biggest, although it's much shorter. The pool drops over an impressive horizon line but doesn't travel more than 50 meters until the next pool. Waves deflecting off of the right cliff face add a little variety. The simplest line is to start center/center right, keeping the bow of your boat perpendicular to the deflected waves before straightening yourself out for the final big crashing waves. Considering how short the rapid is, I decide to go first, sit in the pool at the bottom, and then wave Elizabeth and Shane down. Elizabeth comes first, but when she hits the deflecting wave she gets pushed to the left and flips. Immediately she gets to setup position and, while still in the rapid, goes for a roll. Unfortunately she isn't able to get up, and when she goes back underwater her head is no longer safely tucked in setup position, rather it's pushed onto her backdeck.

Anyone who kayaks will know this position well. It's horrifying. In setup position, your face and hands are pressed against your kayak, keeping them well away from rocks. Instead your helmet takes the impact. When flipped on your backdeck, your face is exposed to the riverbed. Your hands, deep in the water, scrape along the riverbed. The worst part about this is, in order to get back to the setup position, you need to swing your torso forward. This pushes your face deeper, closer to the rocks. If you're flipped on your back deck, the only thing you can do is keep your head high, put your elbows in front of your face, and pray. Usually this works. Some days it doesn't. Today was one of those days.

Elizabeth comes out of her boat. At first I don't notice anything wrong, however when I shout to her asking if she's okay, all I get back is, "My teeth." I paddle out to her, grabbing onto her boat and telling her to swim to

the eddy. It quickly becomes clear that she is panicking. I drop her boat and tell her to grab onto the back of mine. We pull into a small choppy eddy. I turn around asking if she's okay. Her face is covered in blood. When she opens her mouth to respond, more blood spills out. I'm caught off guard, and for a little bit I'm not sure what to do. I can see she has a massive cut on her lower lip. When I ask her to smile I can see that most of her front teeth are broken in half. Trying to stay calm, I ask her if she's okay a bunch of times. She tells me to stop asking. Shane pulls into the eddy. I tell him to secure Elizabeth's boat. He looks back apologetically, not understanding what I'm asking. Elizabeth seems to be in much less pain than her injuries would suggest. Maybe this is because she is in shock. Maybe it's because the water is numbingly cold. Maybe it's because she's built different. If I was in her position I'm sure I would be much less calm. Fortunately she is cooperative and calm.

The Capilano Canyon is gorgeous (get it?). Unfortunately its sheer granite walls make evacuation difficult. Where we are there is no shoreline, the cliffs dive straight into the water. This means I can't pull Elizabeth out of the water to give her a proper check. It also means we can't hike out. Thankfully the granite cliffs are not continuous, there are a few steep scramby trails that adventurous fishermen use to access the river. Not sure where the closest such trail is, we decide to go and look. Elizabeth holds the back of my boat, and I paddle back into the current. We round a blind corner and paddle about 80 meters of flatwater before we find a gravel bar. Here I give her a closer look, and notice a big gash above her eyebrow that's accounting for the majority of the blood still coming down her face. A fisherman on the gravel bar takes interest in us, and gives us the good news: there is a "trail" just ahead that leads out of the river. He brings us to his fishing partner, a nurse, who gives Elizabeth a look.

While Elizabeth is getting her cuts cleaned out with river water soaked toilet paper, I paddle back upstream and find Shane and the boat still bobbing in the small eddy I left them in. Shane has a cowtail and there are no rapids below the eddy that prevent him from safely towing the boat (I was able to paddle upstream into the eddy!). Still, he hasn't moved the boat. I shouted to Shane, asking him to do just that. He looks at me confused. I forgot about that. In a moment of sheer stupidity I verbally acknowledge he cannot speak English before asking him again, in English, to move out of the eddy. He looks at me confused. The eddy is small, and Elizabeth's boat is being pushed by the strong current into a large crack in the cliff. With Shane in the way, I can barely stay in the eddy and have no chance at retrieving the boat. I pull my phone out of my PFD in an attempt to use Google Translate. No service. Finally, getting a little frustrated, I decide enough is enough. I find the grabhandle on Shane's kayak and pull him out of the eddy. I flip Elizabeth's boat upright and push it into the current towards Shane. I motion to him with

my hands that he should use his cowtail, but I can't get the message across. I give up, and push the boat the 80 meters to the gravel bar. We leave our three boats on the river bank.

Shane and the fisherman start on the trail out of the canyon, and Elizabeth and I follow. It's typical BC root scrambling, but Elizabeth makes light work of it. That being said, she's talking less and I can tell the pain is getting worse. At the top of the canyon we catch up to Shane, make our way to the road, and start walking to his van at the put in. He drives us to my car at the takeout, and I drive Elizabeth to the hospital. The triage nurse tells us it will be three hours until a doctor is available, so I leave Elizabeth and head back to the river. I meet Shane, and together we head down the trail in order to retrieve the boats.

The trail is far too steep to carry the boats up, so I set up a 3:1 pulley off a tree root, and haul them out one by one. My throwrope is only fifty feet, so two "pitches" are needed. The second pitch isn't so steep so, as long as Shane pushes from the bottom, I'm able to pull up the boats without a mechanical advantage. We pull the boats through the forest and load them onto our cars. The process takes about an hour. By the time we're done Elizabeth is ready for pickup (doctor came around early), and I've got a parking ticket.

# Telkwa Pass, An Inquiry Into Whitewater Biking

*Elias Bowman*

*Aug 6th - 8th, 2025*

*Telkwa Pass, An Inquiry into Whitewater Biking*

*Participants: Charlotte Mittelstaedt, James Price, Elias Bowman*

On Witsuwit'en Yin Tah and Laxyuubm Ts'msyen

**I**n Northwestern BC, between the towns of Smithers and Terrace, Highway 16 meanders around the North edge of the Hazelton Range, following the Bulkley and Skeena rivers on its path to the sea. This route is gorgeous and to be explored in its own right; however, these two hubs can be connected more directly by traversing the Telkwa Pass, a series of old mountainous logging/pipe-line/powerline roads, due west of Smithers. Despite being a shorter distance, I would only recommend this scenic route to the traveller not looking to make it anywhere in a hurry.

**Photo** Merry compatriots at the Pass Summit.



Having spent my summer working for BC Parks out of Bowron Lakes, a 10-day off stint in August gave me enough time to travel up to the Skeena to see friends working in the area. This is how I found myself on a sunny morning driving east out of Terrace with Charlotte Mittelstaedt, Keilin and Joelle, after what their landlords angrily described as a three-day party. To the town of Smithers we drove, meeting more friends along the way, moving a hitchhiker further down the road, and generally having a jolly good time. In Smithers, we picked up James Price and his bike in tow and continued south. Upon making it to Telkwa, we celebrated with a pre-trip ice cream before Charlotte, James, and I biked west towards the Telkwa River FSR, leaving friends behind to fish.

We gradually climbed along a quiet FSR, passed by only a single side-by-side and a dirt bike. The biking was easy, the company was good, and we spent the time catching up about our summers, since we'd seen each other last.

We had schemed up this trip months earlier in about three messages. The fact that it came together with a perfect weather window and availability between friends was pretty miraculous. Even more awesome was that all actual planning took place the day before over FaceTime in a Save-On Foods.

During said call, James insisted we buy the largest bag of potato chips we could find for atop mac and cheese on night one. The damage sustained by the 3/4kg Compliments bag of chips from being strapped to the rear of Charlotte's bike was substantial, and I fear we may have left a trail of BBQ treats for critters in the area.

We biked around 45 km on the FSR before reaching the official "trail," which was just a degraded continuation of the FSR. After the trailhead sign, the road progressively got steeper and looser. On the first day, we braved one river crossing (a first for me with a bike) and several hike-a-bike hills, which was a semi-ominous sign of what was to come. We arrived at top lake, and camped on a rocky beach full of dead cedars, an unofficial campsite but much nicer than the actual site further down the road. That night, we had a glorious little fire and an entertaining bear hang, a skill I fear I will never master.

The second day, the trail was worse than the first, but also much more engaging. A friend who biked the route earlier in the summer reported there was "seven km of hike-a-bike" at an unspecified point along the trail. Thus, throughout the trip, we pondered "is this the dreaded hike, or could it still be ahead of us?", and we never did quite decide. The going was tough, with many gnarly, steep, and loose up and downs - meaning walking uphill while biking downhill and flats. I wouldn't call this prime bike territory, but it was manageable to the keen-for-a-rough-ride biker.

Progressively, we came across more dramatic creek crossings. Until they frequently morphed into semi-continuous creek biking, where the river had realized the road surface was a more effective path downhill than its previous bed and redirected to flood the entire trail. This became a bit of a comical

challenge to pedal through, at times having your feet fully enter the water on every crank rotation. Sploosh, Sploosh, Sploosh. I now feel competent saying I am a beginner in the discipline of “whitewater biking”.

Before knowing anything about the route, I had committed to doing the trip in my rainboots based on my lack of other appropriate footwear, and the route vindicated that decision. Only one period of true sub-aquatic travel forced me to swap gumboots for sandals, a decision James and Charlotte had made several kilometers earlier.

As we cruised through rivers and creeks, over rock fields and rubble, or within shrubby dark tunnels, we got progressively better views of the area with big mountains and hanging glaciers. We reached the pass summit around a large lake, with incredible views and a nice beach. From here, we were generally losing elevation towards the Skeena valley, but still felt the grind as we encountered no lack of hills.

We saw only a single side-by-side on this section of the pass, having driven up from Terrace. However, for most of the journey, we had frequent friends flying overhead in helicopters, accessing the big hydro lines that were next to the trail. We exited the pass on the west side, high above the Zymoetz River, to a much busier FSR. Here we biked past trucks, helicopter staging zones,



**Top** Views of the pass.  
*Elias Bowman*

**Bottom and left**  
Some examples of creek  
biking.  
*Elias Bowman*

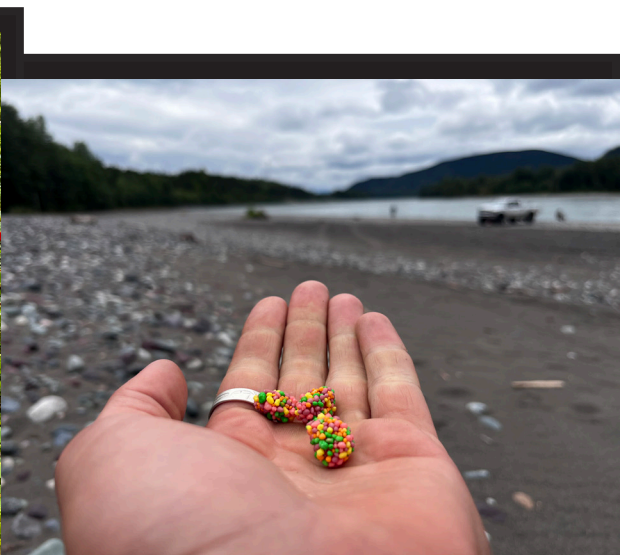
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and various hydro, forestry, and gas line workers, who even once offered us a beer as we cruised by them. Most amusingly, while we biked the last stretch of road for the day, we were buzzed by one of the helicopters over us on the logging road.

A final major downhill brought us from high on a ridge to riverside in mere minutes, and as I let my hands recover from the vibrations and excitement of the hair-raising descent, we picked berries of all sorts from alongside the road. That evening, we stayed at the Salmon Run Rec Site and ate the biggest red huckleberries (my personal favourite) I have ever seen.

The following morning, we biked out to Terrace on a much busier road than any previous section. The river valley was typical of the coast, full of big trees, moody skies, and blue-green glacier water. We rolled into Terrace for lunch on the banks of the Skeena, featuring the best biking snack, the Nerd Gummy Clusters, and then biked to Charlotte's house. Minutes after returning to town, I left to meet our friends who had spent the weekend fishing in Smithers to go climbing at Terrace Mountain. After some lovely climbing pitches, we returned to Charlotte's for another dinner that couldn't be beat, and we all slept in the living room for one last party.

**Left** Charlotte picking Red Huckleberries. *Elias Bowman*  
**Right** NGC's on the Skeena River. *Elias Bowman*





## **The Río Jataté: A Trip of Stretching Comfort Zones, Trench Foot, and Hormigas!**

*Colette Bennett*

*Dec. 20 - 28, 2025*

*Chiapas, Mexico*

*Participants: Colette Bennett, Rocky Contos, Gerardo Elizondo, Barbara Conboy, Tom Pollard, Drew Lopez, Tim Melton, Alec Panten, John Ware, Billy Miller, Martin Hosinger, Eric Riley, Make Huckaby, Cathy Waterman, Erin Buzuwis, Ann Gillard.*

### **Backgrounder:**

**M**y last day of work last summer was a sunny day rafting the Skeena. It's always only our organization on the river, so when we saw a fleet of rafts and kayaks, I was curious. At the take-out, I got to talking with the leader of the Babine River expedition, who immediately invited me on an upcoming trip. What the heck?! I said yes because he couldn't be serious. I don't even know this guy.

A few days later, I received an email from Rocky Contos about the upcoming trip to the Río Jataté, a class IV river deep in the jungle of southern

**Photo** The River Rats *Drew Lopez*

Mexico. Turned out Rocky is a world-class rafter/kayaker who wrote the guide-books for Mexican whitewater and founded a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting threatened rivers around the world. He's also a former neuroscientist and has completed many first descents of rivers in the Americas.

I hadn't traveled outside of the US and Canada alone, nor had I ventured outside of any tourist-tailored environment. I'm not a class IV paddler, and I've never been on an expedition-style trip, and I hadn't spent more than 5 minutes with this Rocky guy. On top of that, the state of Chiapas is not a place travel advisories recommend going to... It all felt totally crazy, but before I knew it, I had booked my flight.

There's a lot going on in Chiapas. It's the poorest state in Mexico and is incredibly remote in some parts. In recent years, there has been increased cartel violence, and since the 90s, the famed Zapatista uprising.

The Zapatistas are an Indigenous rebellion organization seeking autonomy over their territories and natural resources and asserting their right to self-govern. The Mexican government has a long history of oppression and violence against Indigenous peoples. In 1994, following years of military organizing in the Lacandon jungle surrounding the Jataté, Subcomandante Marcos (an anonymous figurehead of the movement) led an attack on cities with Mexican authority. The Zapatistas do not prefer violence, but after 500 years of discrimination, poverty, and genocide, the Zapatistas said "Ya Basta!" – enough is enough. The attack against the Mexican government only lasted a few days, after which they began a dialogue with officials to establish Indigenous rights in Chiapas and greater Mexico—reclamation was beginning. Then, out of nowhere, the Mexican government reversed all progress by electing expressly counterinsurgent officials and committing more acts of violence against the Zapatistas. Since then, the Zapatistas have refocused their efforts on increasing capacity and autonomy within their communities and sharing "the Zapatista word" abroad, where they've gathered support and accelerated the international "Land Back" movement.

What is truly remarkable is the Zapatistas' strength and endurance, which have enabled them to maintain a strong political presence for over 30 years. As changes in BC emerge and land title is granted back to its rightful caretakers, I couldn't help but wonder if the Zapatistas' sacrifices laid the groundwork for resistance in Canada and across the planet. What began as a frightening trip disclaimer quickly became a point of fascination and inspiration.

### **Day 1:**

It quickly occurred to me how remote we were as we drove the windy road to the put-in on the Río Santa Cruz, a main tributary of the Río Jataté. We were six hours and many green valleys over from the nearest town (Palenque), pass-

ing through villages where locals rode on horseback, running water was non-existent, and children played along the streets with dogs, cats, and turkeys in tow. We munched on spikey rambutans and told tales of our past adventures, our sweaty thighs sticking to the van seats.

The first day, we would paddle raft the Río Santa Cruz, a bright turquoise canyon, as it joins the Jataté, and then float to our first campsite, where we would be met with the rest of the boats and gear. As we launched under a bridge, the locals gathered above and watched as we tackled our first rapid and disappeared into the gorge. Those first 20 minutes might have been the most beautiful of the whole river. The Santa Cruz cuts through an incredibly narrow canyon, with smooth walls like those of Zion National Park, except lush, turquoise, and with long vines hanging from the ceiling. Our voices echoed, and water dripped melodiously from above. I felt ancient. To my dismay, the river insisted we must re-emerge, and soon after, we joined the Río Jataté, paddling past tall waterfalls dumping straight into the river.

### **Day 2:**

Day 2 started with rigging the boats, which took ALL MORNING to my surprise. We managed to get two vehicles stuck in the mud in the process: first trying to push them up the hill, then a z-drag, and finally strapping makeshift spikes to the wheels as seen on TikTok, which miraculously worked. The whole time, fire ants (hormigas) nipped at our ankles. The float today was about covering distance. No rapids,



### **Above**

Me rowing on the flat section before the canyon. *Drew Lopez*

### **Below**

### **Left**

A group of Rancheros watching us from the river's edge. *Drew Lopez*

### **Right**

Traveling through the canyon on the Río Santa Cruz. *Drew Lopez*



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just 24 km of meandering river in a great big mountainous valley. The banks backed up to local farms (or Ejidos), and it quickly became apparent that they knew we were coming. Amazing that word of mouth can travel quicker than a raft; soon, the locals were waiting for us.

What's so special about this particular river is that access is not usually permitted. The Zapatista communities disapprove of "gringos" recreating on their river at no expense paid to their communities. What used to be a world-class whitewater destination in the '80s soon became sparsely attempted after some attacks on travelers, until, of course, Rocky Contos came along. He made the first descent in decades, was forcibly stopped by locals, and then, after talking to community members, organized a deal under which he could run trips a few times a year after paying a "passage fee" to the Zapatistas. Now Rocky's organization, Global Grand Canyons, is the only one in the world allowed to raft this river. Talk about a remarkable opportunity.

As darkness began to swallow the rivers from their banks inwards, we abruptly entered the canyon. The walls were thousands of feet high, covered in every sort of vegetation imaginable, and pink and white limestone stripes peeking through. We could barely see the few class III rapids we needed to pass before our campsite.

Night two was definitely the coolest campsite I had ever been to. Our tents backed right up to the canyon wall, and as I drifted off to sleep, lulled by the heavy pitter-patter of the rain on my tent-fly, I wondered if rockfall from the walls above would crush me in the night.

### Days 3-5:

After that lengthy 24 km day, Rocky made it clear that while we were in the main canyon, with the brunt of the rapids, we would be moving A LOT slower. Between scouting, setting up safety, and running the complex rapids, we would not be moving much more than three km per day. What was unique about this canyon in particular is the Travertine drops: a gorgeous and peculiar type of river feature that occurs when logs and rocks in calcium-rich rivers are crusted over, creating permanent pool-drops and slides. It's a rare phenomenon, and Chiapas is one of the few places you can experience it in a raft.

We scouted the first rapid, a class IV. Between all the build-up to this moment, my inexperience with class IV water, a larger volume than I had ever seen, and the pressure of performing in front of new comrades, I was petrified—nearly shaking. I decided to let someone else row and sit as a passenger for now. After all, I wasn't reliable in this state. It was big and bumpy, and actually a lot of fun. And so, after the first one was done, everything went up from there. By the end of the day, I was rowing class IV without white-knuckling the oars. I had definitely underestimated myself.

There were two class Vs in the main canyon, which I didn't need to

have anything to do with. The churning water, 10+ foot drops, and nearly unavoidable holes pushed the limit. When I mustered up the courage, I rode as a passenger with Rocky, and we made it down the biggest rapid of my life: Slide (V). Our boats looked so insignificant and small on such huge water.

What turned out to be the most destructive in this canyon was actually Pitan Falls (IV). In this particular rapid, the beginning — where a good setup position is crucial — was super shallow, which made keeping your line without bumping rocks challenging and correcting mistakes futile. Then most of the water flowed off a large drop and straight into “Pitan” rock, where most of the water bounced left into a massive hole, and the remainder went right into a narrow, squeeze-like drop. Scouting this one was horrible. In order to see the rapid, you had to stand partially in the river, where any misstep would sweep you away into the big mess.

So, my raft partner, Billy, and I watched as all the boats before us went. All but the last managed the safe side of the rock. The last just barely missed the right water and got swept into the supermassive black hole. The raft jittered and bounced around in the hole until, ultimately, it flipped, flushing the three swimmers out of the rapid... but the raft remained rolling around in the whitewash for nearly five minutes before it too came out. Boy, was that a retentive hole. Billy and I looked at each other with ghostly white faces—we weren’t about to follow that up. Extensive effort was required to get the kayak guide, now our boat captain, up the falls and back over to our side of the river so he could take the reins. There was no walking out of this one. The two of us sat at the front paddling for our lives as we barely made it out the right side. Woohoo!

On the bright side, there were many favorites. I loved the lengthy rapids with many pool drops. They were complicated and required technical skill, yet didn’t risk swallowing rafts whole. So much FUN!

Erin Buzuvis, one of the five kayakers on our trip, had a pretty rough go two days in a row. The first canyon day, Erin took a far-right line and lodged

**Left** One of the many travertine drops. The lip is very shallow, and it’s easy to get stuck. *Drew Lopez*

**Right** The far left line at Pitan Falls (IV). Only a few boats took this line, I’m still not sure if it was any better... *Drew Lopez*



the nose of her boat under a huge log, where she struggled to undo her spray skirt. She sat there, death-gripping the log above in order to avoid being sucked down any further. She managed to self-rescue and crawl out of her boat in time. To be shaken up by an incident like that would be putting it lightly, yet the next day, she got back in her boat to kick more ass. Unfortunately, after flipping on the second day, Erin scraped her chin and nose on a slide and was left with quite a nasty gash.

The last canyon day, it was clear we were all getting tired. Rocky had previously named one class III “Muchos Nadando,” meaning many swimming, and what do you know? There were many swimmers. Somewhere in there, too, I got into a precarious situation in this folder of a drop, which broke an oar in half, sent Billy swimming, and lodged me between some rocks while I hurried to replace what had broken.

It was an exhausting few days. What I know now is that most rivers aren't this intense. There was barely any time between each challenging rapid. But we got through it, and now I hold myself with confidence in the class IVs.

On Christmas Eve, we rolled up to the next campsite in a big valley by a military base, where the water had spread out significantly. That night, the biggest gifts of all were cow patties and red-hot hormigas.

### **Day 6 / Christmas:**

Christmas on a river in the remote Mexican jungle was a pretty cool place to be. Now that we were out of the main canyon, the views of the surrounding valley were expansive and extremely lush. The river had taken on many different channels, had a lower gradient, and was a ton of fun. Now, the drops were only a few feet tall, but the lines were narrow and required considerable technical skill. At one point, I went through a slot so narrow that my oar shot-putted out of my grasp and straight into my nose, making it the second time I've broken my nose ring on a trip.

Then the Río Tzaconeja entered the Jataté. It was chocolate brown and pushy compared to the azul and now tranquil Río Jataté. Somewhere up that river, it had been raining really hard. This confluence also marked the end of the travertine. Quickly, we were funneled into the swift lower canyon, only a few boats' width across, with huge boils and jagged bedrock banks.

There were a few really big class IVs, one of which was super long and ended around a corner where everyone below was telling me, “Go right! Right! Right!” Thinking I was through the thick of it, I stayed more middle than I should've and narrowly escaped the biggest hole I had ever seen. It was the size of a bus, and it came out of absolutely nowhere. Thank the river gods we didn't get sucked down into that.

El Paso Soledad, “The Pathway to Loneliness,” is the big one. It's what this trip is famous for. A humongous and very long class V. It's so long

that scouting it is nearly impossible, so Rocky brought along a drone to get a birds-eye view of what lies way downstream. As he flew his drone, the rest of us scrambled up the steep banks in order to get a peek. We could see nothing, and the banks very suddenly cliffed out, so we all retreated back to the boats, trying to conceive what could possibly be worse than Slide, Pitan Falls, or any of the other thunderous rapids that came before.

As soon as Rocky began to explain what lay ahead, as if on cue, rain began to pour from the skies in the most intense rainstorm I had ever seen. DUN DUN DUUUUN! The river glistened with raindrops, and the small trail we scouted quickly became a river itself. The plan was to avoid the majority of the rapids by taking the right-most channel, which was inconveniently guarded by a series of jagged rocks and shallow water, making it really difficult to control a boat. The current would quickly push you back into the main flow, so timing was critical. We would make sure the kayakers (nimble and can easily make it into the correct channel) stood waiting at the entrance with throw bags to reel us back in, in case we didn't make it. If we missed all the checkpoints, it would be a long, bumpy ride down a class V staircase. Between Rocky's serious demeanour (which I hadn't yet seen), the pounding rain, and the shared silence across the team, the fear set in.

Then came our turn. A nervous wreck, I decided not to row but to be ready for a throw bag. Drew, who was rowing, powered us hard to the other side of the river, preparing to thread the needle and act fast. As we traveled through the slots, at the last moment a rock hit the bottom of the raft, knocking us off course. Visions of catapulting down El Paso Soledad flickered in my head, and I motioned for the throw bag. Quick!!! I caught it and held on tight as our boat pendulumed into the slower channel. My heart was beating so fast. Thank god we made it. I noticed some locals watching us from a rock outcropping, fascinated.

This right channel rejoined the main class V flow maybe halfway down the rapid, which Rocky would be rowing for us. We all portaged ourselves through a cave and then a mountain trail to meet the group in the eddy below. It felt crazy only to see the aftermath of Rocky re-entering the eddy with a huge grin across his face after rowing what seemed like death on the river. And then it was over. We set up camp on a wide beach, only to be re-greeted by heavy rain that continued without pause throughout the evening. Christmas dinner was spent huddled under a tarp in our wet, stinky river clothes, wishing for a break to set up our tents.

### **Day 7, Take-out day:**

I awoke to what seemed like the sun, but quickly turned to rain again. The river had risen almost three feet overnight. Stepping out of my tent, I realized my feet hurt. Around the morning fire, many of the others said the same. That was



**Left** The sneak channel at El Paso Soledad. *Rocky Contos*

**Right** Regrouping at the base of El Paso Soledad. Hearts thumping.  
*Drew Lopez*

weird. I took off my socks, and there were red holes all over my feet. Trench foot. I'd made jokes about having trench foot as a raft guide in Alaska because it was something I thought we had left in the last century. But what I learned is that it's real and definitely no joke. I could feel every grain of sand in every wobbly step. My ankles and toes were inflamed. The only antidote is to dry your feet, and seeing as though we were stuck on a river in an endless stream of rain, that wasn't about to happen. On top of that, three people were violently sick. Maybe it was from accidentally drinking the water, maybe Norovirus, but also quite possibly from the bat cave the groover was in that night. We were NOT in good shape this morning.

But we didn't have far to travel today, so everything should be alright. The takeout was only a few class IIIs and a IV away. I could stand being on my feet for a little longer. We set off and were immediately taken aback by how big the water had become overnight. It was like being in a blender full of chocolate milk. Flood water.

Rocky knows this river better than anyone, but even that didn't get us through today. The water having risen so much, Rocky didn't recognize which eddy we would be scouting the class IV from until it was quickly upon him; he realized he had taken the wrong line and went straight into a hole, flipping his raft, sending everyone swimming. I hadn't even realized this had happened, but coming around the corner, our group was shouting: "Go right! Right! Right!" After narrowly missing the last hole yesterday, I obeyed and survived the big drop. In the eddy below, it was a disaster. More passengers than boats. And not enough room to stay for long. I picked up three passengers and continued downstream behind the boat ahead of me. Around the corner, the waves became humungous, 8, 9, 10 feet maybe. I saw the boat ahead of me begin to get surfed in a hole, a flip imminent. Maybe it was instinct, maybe it was the river, or maybe it was my own skill operating the boat, but we careened into them with enough force to bump them out and not get stuck ourselves. In the force of it all, Martin was projected out of the boat and into the soup. To swim in this

water would be petrifying. The next eddy, I worked hard to reel myself in. From here we could watch all the carnage unfold... and hopefully be a little helpful.

Martin swam his way to the boat, gasping for air. Then Drew and John rode on theirs upside-down by us, having flipped where we had bumped the other boat out. And a few minutes later, Rocky appeared on his capsized boat too. All the other swimmers had collected on this shoreline, and being the only boat left, it was my job to get all five of us downstream. On top of that, we dislodged a kayak from some rocks and now had two strapped to the back. I was nervous being the only one capable of this mission, but it was also incredibly confidence-building. Despite the extra weight, I made it down the final lengths of the Río Jataté and safely into the take-out eddy.

To say we were all a little shell-shocked was an understatement. The catastrophe that unfolded in just a matter of an hour was unbelievable. But we were all okay. The others with the flipped rafts had missed the take-out and were just a bit further downstream, but with teamwork and help from the locals, we all reunited on the road system in no time.

I looked down from the bridge crossing the Río Jataté in awe. I had never seen water so big and beautiful and unforgiving. I thought about the strength and capability I showed today in the face of some frightening, complicated situations, and I realized how much I had sold myself short. This river was expertly challenging, but I could do it, and did do it, and would do it again. I'm good at this. Even though I'm a woman, I'm young, small, and sometimes appear underwhelming, that doesn't mean that I don't have the same or more skills than the person next to me. I can tackle anything I set my mind to and should fucking own it.

I spent the long car ride back to Ocosingo itching my many bug bites, applying anti-fungal cream to my feet, and trying not to inhale whatever exotic disease was quickly spreading throughout the group—but also dreaming of doing this again very soon.

### *Photo*

Reflecting while winding through narrow mountain roads on the way to Ocosingo.

*Drew Lopez*



## Self Propelled Ski Summit Attempt of Pelion

*Helena Sverak*

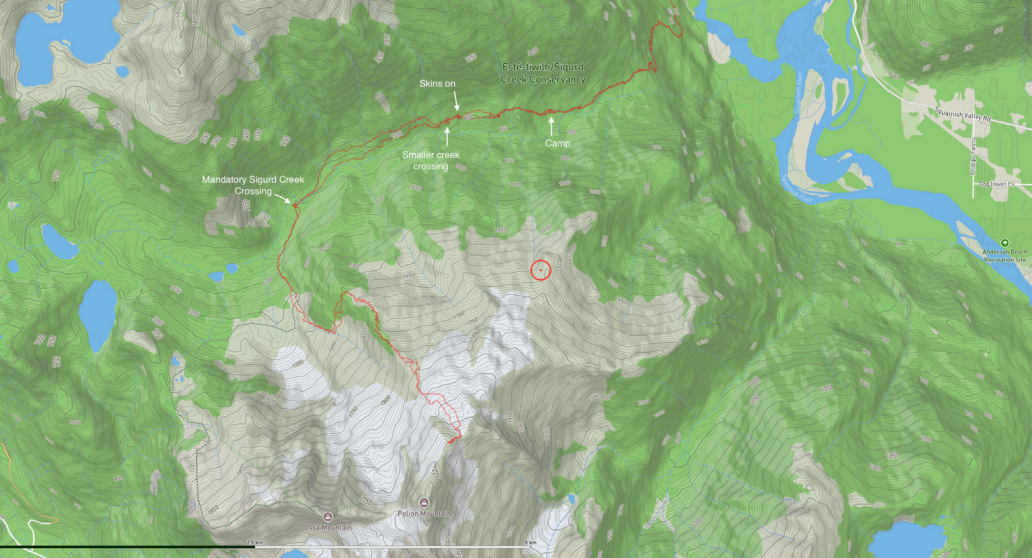
*April 18th - April 20th, 2025*

*Pelion Mountain, Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy, Squamish BC*

*Participants: Corey Monteith, Helena Sverak, Vivian Liu*

Summitting Mount Baker (Kulshan) via a self-propelled bike ski trip had been my primary objective for the past year. On every clear day in Vancouver, Baker peaks above the horizon, prominent on the skyline. My winter revolved around preparing for this: gaining experience with technical ski objectives, multi-day winter camping, crevasse rescue, wilderness first aid, and multiple bike-ski trips. Easter weekend gave me a rare four-day window off from grad school, April 17th-21st, so everything was lined up. I found a crew of five keeners and was just finishing recovery from a knee flare-up. Then the forecast rolled in – a perfect weather window from Tuesday to Friday, followed by a storm moving in on Saturday. The crew held onto hope that the weather would shift, but the closer we got, the worse it looked. By Wednesday, we decided to bail. Disappointment doesn't begin to cover it. To grieve the demise of the objective, we turned to John Baldwin's Exploring the Coast Mountains on Skis to salvage the long weekend.

The forecast was strange: sunny skies in Vancouver, but clouds and precipitation swirling around nearly every mountain around us – Kulshan, the Coquihalla, Whistler, the Duffey, and north in Lillooet. Oddly enough, the best weather seemed to be in the Tantalus Range. Mount Pelion stood out as a highly recommended spring ascent in Baldwin's book. Listed at 21 km round trip, the route was described as a two-day trip or a strenuous one-day mission. Our plan: bike 100 km to the trailhead on Friday, reach the snowline that evening, summit Saturday, and descend and bike home Sunday. After Kulshan fell through, a few folks dropped, leaving just Corey Monteith, Vivian Liu, and



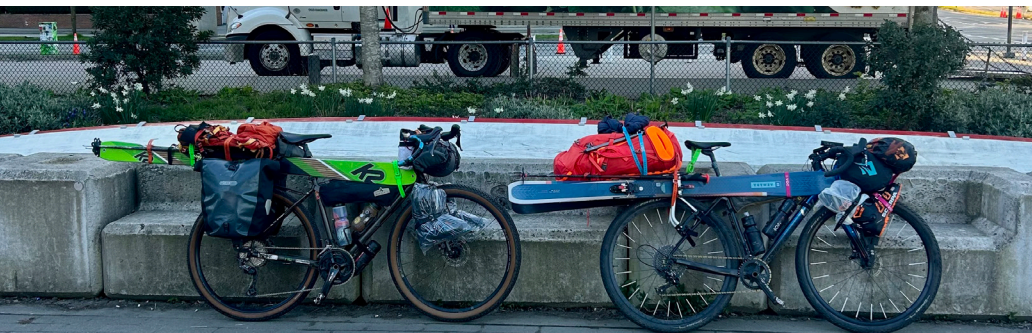
### **Photo Map Report *Helena Sverak***

me. Vivian, still recovering from a 26-hour ski mission the weekend before, planned to join only for the bike leg.

You can learn many lessons in three long days. One of the biggest is that a guidebook written 15 years ago doesn't account for the snowpacks of today. We figured mid-April would be a safe bet, since the book recommends March through May, but the conditions told a different story.

Packing for a multi-day bike-ski trip makes you hyper-aware of what's essential and what counts as a luxury item. I went as light as I could without cutting corners on safety: a full glacier kit, ski crampons, boot crampons, and an ice axe. Things I left behind included goggles, coffee, hiking boots, hut booties, tent stakes, and a lunch for Day 2. My luxury item was a pair of fresh socks for every day. I got home from work at 8:00 pm, finished setting up my bike by 10:00 pm, mapped the approach with a pencil on a printed CalTopo map, and finally wrapped up packing around 1:00 am. At 7:00 am the next morning, I

### **Photo Bike Setup *Helena Sverak***



rolled down the hill toward Science World with my fully loaded, 95-pound bike. The start felt smooth, and I tried not to think too hard about the hills to come on the Sea-to-Sky. The weather was beautiful and sunny, and I did my physio stretches while waiting for Corey. We pedaled along the Seawall and tackled our first hill, ascending through the Stanley Park Causeway onto the Lions Gate. Flats and downhills are generally the same speed; it's just the hills that were slow, but we kept it steady, and it felt doable.

Once we made it to Horseshoe Bay, we merged onto the Sea-to-Sky. I was a bit terrified of biking on the highway, but with some music, I was able to calm down and focus on the lovely scenery. We stopped for coffee at Lions Bay and got some satisfaction passing cars stuck in traffic. The shoulder was actually decent, with the only sketchy section being the ascent to Murrin Park, but after that, it was smooth sailing. We arrived in Squamish around 12:30 pm. Vivian met us as Nesters as we scarfed down half a chicken and snacks. We chatted about ski and traverse plans as we basked in the sun, Vivian filling us in on the beta for Supercouloir. After refilling our bottles and topping up on snacks, we headed up the Squamish River Valley. We reached the Ashlu Bridge quickly and found the Sigurd Creek Trail at a lofty elevation of 80 m. All hopes of biking up any more elevation immediately went out the window; it was a full hiking trail from the start. Vivian treated us with fresh fruit, and we took a moment to rest and ponder. A point of regret was that neither of us brought hiking shoes. I decided to fully commit to my ski boots for the hike, while Corey decided to test his cycling shoes on the trail. We transitioned, said goodbye to Vivian, hid our bikes in the bushes, and began hiking around 5:00 pm.

The trail almost immediately started gaining serious elevation, and we scrambled up boulders and switchbacks, testing the traction on our respective footwear. The snowline seemed impossibly far away. Finally, at 700 m, snow started appearing. It had taken us 3 hours to go 6 km. However, we also felt the first raindrops, and daylight was fading. We had been hoping to reach 1000 m, but decided to camp early to avoid soggy snow. After we set up the tent and ate dinner, we discussed our next day. I knew earlier starts were better, but I was worried about the scale of the next day and my ability to recover, so I asked for a 7:00 am start, and Corey agreed. I fell asleep about 20 seconds after my head hit the pillow.

We woke up, made oatmeal and coffee, and packed our daypacks. The mountain peaks were covered in clouds, but sunlight filtered into our camp. We were hopeful. We left around 8:00 am and started the hike up, starting the day with skis still on our backs. Eventually, the snow began to cover more ground, and we started postholing, so we finally put on our skis around 1000 m and skinned on. There were many little creeks, but each had thin snow bridges. The valley was peaceful and full of wildlife – we caught sight of a bobcat checking us out before bounding away up the mountain. At 11:00 am, we reached the

signage for the Sigurd Creek foot-bridge. To our dismay, there was no bridge, just some tracks that went down one side of the snow and back up the other. After a bit of disbelief, we came to terms with the fact that we would be fording across the river. We awkwardly set up our A-frames on the riverbank, trying to avoid standing on snow with our bare feet and getting our gear wet with the meter of space we had. I went first; the water was faster than I was expecting, but the cold was less shocking than I feared, and before I knew it, I was on the other side. We dried our feet with our shirts and kept on moving.

After the creek, the true ski ascent began. Soon, we made it to the open basin as the sun-baked snow turned soft and slushy. We were greeted by the imposing sight of the Ossa mountain face, complete with a large slide that had ripped across much of its north face, reminding us of the terrain's consequences. We picked our way around avi debris to ascend around the tree line to the northwest ramp at 1500 m. We discussed risk while eating lunch around 1:30 pm. I felt guilty that our late start had been the wrong call, but we decided to start up the ramp, assess conditions as we went, and turn around if the snow felt too soft or the clouds closed in. Luckily, the clouds held off, and the snow firmed up, so we made it to the northern col in no time. At the top of the col, we met a pair of skiers who had been planning to do the Tantalus Traverse, but got held up by the weather. We had seen them the day before at the trailhead. Not needing



**Above** Bike There

**Bottom** Creek



to transition from biking to skiing gave them a one-hour head start on us, but with their fresh legs and proper shoes, they had made it all the way to the open valley the night before. They told us they woke up for an alpine start, only to face horrible visibility and icy conditions that ended their traverse attempt. Maybe our late start might have actually worked out in our favor.

Looking toward the summit, we couldn't see the "notch" the guide-book described. Instead, we saw exposed rock and sparsely covered chimneys, separated from us by a 50-degree slope. This wasn't the only piece of misleading beta—we were already at 19 km one way, nearly double the 21 km total distance listed in the book. We asked our new friends we'd met if they knew the route. They'd done the ascent the previous year and pointed us toward the correct chimney, warning us that it was steep and exposed. "A fall would definitely be fatal," they casually mentioned. They proposed an alternative route (Labeled B in the picture), but as we had already gained the col, we decided to take a cautious look at the official route (A). We ditched our skis, strapped on our boot crampons, took out our ice axes, and made our way over. The crystalline snow disintegrated like sugar under our steps and didn't inspire confidence. The main chimney was thinly covered and clearly wouldn't hold weight, so we poked around for an alternate line, settling on a more exposed rocky section to the right, which lured us in with its solidity.

The snow surrounding the rock was weak, and a sort of snow-bergschund had formed. As we stood beneath the face, we paused. We talked about the "bail game" (shoutout to Noah Macdonald for the excellent article): success in the mountains isn't just about reaching the summit, it's also about knowing when to walk away. You haven't truly claimed a peak unless you've also played and won the bail game. We decided to see how the rock felt and then make a call. Corey climbed a few meters up; I followed, carefully trusting my crampons and axe on the exposed granite. As I took off my mittens to get a better grip, it started to become apparent this wasn't really just scrambling – we were edging into mixed terrain, with poor snow and no real protection. Even if we could climb up, the descent would be a problem. We had only a 30-meter rope, so any rappel would have to be under 15 meters unless we rigged a rope block. We checked the time: it was 5:00 pm, and we still had 12 km and several creek crossings between us and camp. We were in over our heads: it was time to bail.

We carefully retraced our steps and breathed a sigh of relief when we made it back to our skis. Our friends greeted us with a handful of M&Ms and wished us luck, and we began the descent down the glacier. The snow had crusted over, but the views were absolutely breathtaking. As we dropped lower, the snow softened into smooth, fun turns, and we cruised down to the creek crossing with only a bit of sidestepping. After a mild procrastination fuff and some hyperventilating, we crossed back over, feeling relieved to have our

biggest obstacle behind us. The long exit still loomed, but in theory, the slight downhill grade should make it skiable. In practice, the rolling traverse meant most of it required skinning. Oh well. We made good time until we hit another issue - a melted-out snow bridge over the second-biggest creek we'd crossed. As dusk settled in, we weighed our options. Eventually, Corey anchored me while I carved off the overhanging bank into the creek, creating a mini snow bridge we could cross. From there, it was smooth sailing: skins off, skis out, and a final hike into camp. The sky cleared as darkness settled, stars twinkling overhead. Dinner tasted incredible, and slipping into my sleeping bag felt even better. We set our alarm for 7:00 am and had a slow morning, enjoying our Easter breakfast of oatmeal with mini eggs. We packed up camp, loaded up our bags, and started the hike down. It was a lot easier with gravity on our side, but picking our way down the rocks in our ski boots still took a long time. Finally, the river came into view, and we were back on our bikes a bit after 1:00 pm. We collapsed onto the ground for a bit, dreading the transition fuff. A sprinkle of rain thwarted a potential nap and kicked us into gear. We transitioned slowly as the mental and physical fatigue from the past two days began to settle in. We eventually got moving and packed everything up. My body protested at first, so I took a few breaks for physio stretches, but my legs gradually warmed up. We rolled into Squamish around 5:00 pm. Rain clouds loomed, and the roads were slick, but we somehow dodged getting wet. Once again, our late start seemed to work in our favor, and a rainbow welcomed us as we arrived.

After a stop at McDonald's, we put on music and started on the Sea-to-Sky back home. Kendrick's good kid mAAd city and Charli's brat made the hills melt away. We put on high-vis gear, got our lights flashing, and continued as the sunset faded into the night. Horseshoe Bay flew by, we pedaled across Lions Gate around 11:00 pm, and I made it home just before midnight. I learned a lot on this trip. Most notably, how climate change and smaller snowpacks are reshaping skiing and route beta. We encountered more obstacles than expected - creek crossings, melted-out trails, long distances - that highlighted the ruggedness and unpredictability of the Tantalus Range. The journey was a lesson in patience: taking things one step at a time, staying calm, and solving problems thoughtfully. In the end, this trip challenged us in ways Baker likely wouldn't have: more route-finding, more uncertainty, more decisions made deep in a truly remote place, and more time walking to access the snowline. Traveling through such a wild and significant landscape brought a sense of connection that made the experience deeply rewarding.

More than anything, I'm grateful to live on this land and to move through its wildness and power under my own effort. The Esté-tiwilth / Sigurd Creek Conservancy is a protected old-growth forest, vital habitat for eagles, salmon, grizzlies, wolves, and mountain goats, and a place of deep significance to the Squamish Nation. The conservancy plan calls for a halt to further devel-

## VOCJ68

opment and a phase-out of heli-skiing by 2026. Esté-tiwilh, pronounced us-tut-ee-wayth, means “the great beauty and power that surrounds us, and that we should strive to be in harmony with.”

I hope to carry that perspective forward – into future trips, and into a more thoughtful relationship with the land.

### Photo Sea to Sky Bike





**Above**  
Route

**To the right**  
Where is the snow?

**Below**  
Route Tantalus



## **Bikes, Boats, and Beans - A First Bikepacking Trip**

*Ellen Scott*

*July 19th-20th 2025*

*Salt Spring Island & Victoria*

*Participants: Ellen Scott, AC Muller, Sri Chaitanya, Diego Fernandez, Tim Wang, Soumya Singhal Routery*

**E**very great VOC trip starts bright and early, and my first bikepacking trip was no exception.

At 4:45 am on Saturday, I got onto my fully loaded bike and rode to Wesbrook. There, I met AC Muller and Diego Fernandez outside of Blenz, where we waited for our trip leader, Sri Chaitanya. A couple of minutes past our planned meetup time, he came barrelling around the corner, barely slowing down as he passed us, saying something to the effect of “It’s time to go!”. The three of us hopped onto our bikes and pedalled to catch up with him.

As we rode down Marine Drive in the early morning light, I couldn’t stop smiling. Finally, another week of work had passed, and I was back on an adventure with friends. Not only that, but I was starting my first bikepacking trip. Bikepacking had been a dream of mine for as long as I could remember. I grew up hearing stories of my grandparents’ bike trips on the East Coast of Canada and in Europe. Finally, I was following in their footsteps (or pedal strokes?). We met up with our final team members, Tim Wang and Soumya Singhal Routery, at Eburne Park and started biking together to Tsawwassen. The ride was fairly flat and uneventful. A few hours and 45 km later, we had arrived at the ferry terminal, boarding our first boat of the trip!

The ferry dropped us off at Long Harbour on Salt Spring Island around 10:30 in the morning. We were among many bikers forming a train up the hills from the ferry terminal. A short while later, we found ourselves biking through the main town on Salt Spring, and it appeared there was a market



**Left** Sri waiting in line for tickets *Ellen Scott*



**Right** The team taking a break on the way to the campground *Ellen Scott*

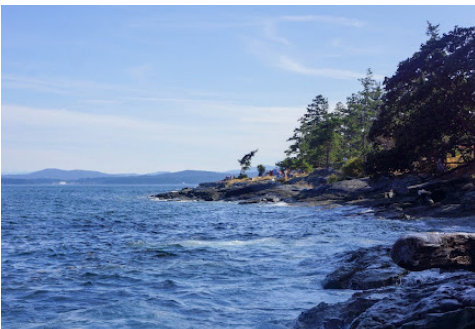
going on. We stopped and walked around for a while, admiring all the incredible artwork and trying to resist the temptation of the plentiful baked goods. After our market stop, we rode on towards the campsite. The way there was very hilly, alternating between painfully steep uphill, zigzagging across the road, and speedy downhill with my hands on the brakes. At around 2 pm, we reached the campsite, passing many ominous “Ruckle Park Campground Full” signs on the way in. Our group split up to find an open spot, but everywhere seemed very full. Thankfully, we managed to score spots in an unmarked overflow area where some fellow bikepackers said they stayed the night before and had no issues.

I was feeling exhausted after our long ride, but luckily, I wasn’t the only one. We made a group decision to rest that afternoon and enjoy our beautiful campsite. It was truly a great spot. Shortly after setting up my tent and eating my falafel wrap at camp, I took a walk down to the water to explore and try to call my parents to tell them about the day. Walking along the rocky tidal pools reminded me of a friend’s cottage we used to visit back home. It made me nostalgic for summer days spent exploring rocky beaches and playing capture the flag with my siblings.

It was a beautiful, cloudless afternoon, and all of us enjoyed it to the fullest. Diego, Tim, and Soumya all took well-deserved naps while AC, Sri, and I chatted and took a dip in the ocean. At dinner time, we took our stoves down to the water. I made a lentil and couscous dish that’s become a staple backpacking meal for me. AC and Sri were enjoying a curry that looked quite good. Tim and Soumya had a nice rice dish with some additions. As for Diego, he made a burrito bowl using canned refried beans (cold) with some taco spice

**Left** The rocky shore of Ruckle Park *Ellen Scott*

**Right** Making dinner at the campground *Ellen Scott*





**Above**

Taking a break in front of Parliament *Ellen Scott*

**Below**

Our bikes lined up for a photo shoot *Ellen Scott*



and instant rice (not fully cooked). It took Diego, Sri, Tim, and Soumya working together to finish the can of beans.

Apparently, both the stars that evening and the sunrise the next morning were incredible. I didn't see either, as I went to bed at 8:30 pm and woke up at 6:30 am.

The next morning, after we had all had our breakfasts and taken down our tents, we discussed the plan for the day. We would be parting ways with Diego, who was on a mission to visit a bakery back in the main town on Salt Spring that his partner Tra Mi had given him a gift card to. The rest of us were not keen to retrace our steps from yesterday and decided we would bike to the other harbour on Salt Spring and take the ferry to Victoria. The ride from the campground went by quickly, and we arrived at Fulford Harbour with high spirits. We weren't the only ones there with bikes and energy. As it turns out, a big charity ride for the Hospice on Salt Spring was going on, and they were all taking the ferry to Victoria as well. I got to chat with some lovely people doing the charity ride while the others went to grab something from the cafe. Later, while we were all sitting on the pier, a man with a camera approached us and asked us for a favour. He asked if we could play a small part in the video he was creating for the ride, we said "sure...?" He started recording and asked us if we knew who Mary (I don't remember the last name) was, and we all shook our heads.

Not long after we became movie stars, it was time to board the ferry to Victoria. We arrived in Swartz Bay and rode to the nearby town of Sidney. We stopped for a delicious lunch at a mermaid-themed restaurant. The food was pricey, but they

had a tofu wrap, so I wasn't complaining. We also got some cool photos of our bikes lined up against the railing with the ocean in the background.

After lunch, we got onto an incredible protected cycle lane that took us all 35 km into downtown Victoria. We arrived downtown to find it crowded with people and old cars. Somehow, we had found ourselves in the middle of an old car show in front of Parliament. After navigating through the crowds, we all dropped our bikes in a circle right on the lawn in front of Parliament. It felt surreal to be sitting there when the plan had never been to go anywhere but Salt Spring that weekend. Sri and AC went off to find ice cream, and I took a nap on the lawn while Tim and Soumya played cards. After a couple of hours, we got back on our bikes to catch the ferry in Swartz Bay.

We caught the 8 pm ferry to Tsawwassen, where we had a mission to be one of the nine people on the 10 pm "bike bus" from the ferry terminal. The next one wouldn't be until 11 pm. We all lined up at the mouth of the ferry as it pulled into the harbour. As soon as we docked, Sri and I were the first ones sprinting with our bikes off the ferry, likely to the confusion of the ferry operators. We hopped on our bikes and pedalled faster than we had all weekend. We arrived first at the bus stop, securing our places on the bus that would take us to Richmond. As it turned out, only one other person ended up taking the bike bus with us, but we celebrated our accomplishment all the same. By this time, I was feeling thoroughly depleted of any energy whatsoever. When we arrived in Richmond and AC, Sri, and I bid farewell to Soumya and Tim to start our ride back to UBC, I began questioning what on earth I was doing. Why was I biking at 11 pm, after a day of already riding almost 100 km, more than I had ever ridden in a single day? Nevertheless, AC and Sri's energy kept me going, and after what felt like an eternity, but was only about 45 minutes, we had arrived back at my house at UBC. Our journey had started almost 43 hours earlier. I did my best to thank AC and Sri for being my guides home and on the entire trip, but I'm not sure I was able to convey how grateful I truly was. AC and Sri, thank you for being incredible human beings and making sure I got home safely. You two are some of the kindest people I know.

With that, my first bikepacking trip came to an end. It was an incredible experience. Bikepacking was everything I dreamed it would be and more. In the future, I may choose to take an earlier ferry back to Vancouver to avoid arriving home at midnight. Otherwise, I wouldn't have changed a single thing about that trip. Thank you to Tim and Soumya for being great bikepacking mentors and for being such great company. Thank you to Diego and AC for bringing the laughter when we needed it most, and thank you to Sri for running an incredible trip!

# So How Do I Get Into Biking?

*Amelie Korzec*

**S**o... You want to get into biking. Where do you even begin? This is an ULTIMATE BEGINNER'S GUIDE to biking! If you have nowhere else to go, this can get you set up with the absolute basics. I was really lost getting into it the past summer, and these are the resources that I came across to help me get into biking affordably! I hope this can help someone in the future too.

## **What type of bike?**

Don't stress too much about this! A bike is a bike, they can all do similar things, it just might be a bit easier with some than others.

There are. A LOT. Of bikes. This site helped me the most:  
<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/bicycle.html>

## **Where to get a bike?**

Now you know what kind of bike you're looking for. There are many places you can get a cheap bike from, but I recommend second hand shops that sell refurbished ones. There's a lot of really nice staff that can point you in the right direction for what you're looking for too!

Bike Kitchen (UBC Nest)

Our Community Bikes (2429 Main Street, Vancouver)

Ride On Again (2255 West Broadway, Vancouver)

Kickstand (1187 Parker St, Vancouver)

There are also some programs that provide free bikes. If you're a UBC student who is Black, Indigenous, or a person of colour, the Bike Kitchen offers free bikes if you sign up on their intake form. For more information: <https://www.thebikekitchen.ca/bikes-for-bipoc>

I would avoid craigslist, as there are a lot of stolen bikes on there. These bikes may have issues that add to your total cost. Purchasing secondhand from a shop will come with a warranty and help with any servicing for your bike. If you buy from a marketplace, make sure to bring a knowledgeable friend to inspect the bike!

### **Supplies**

1. **Helmet:** “No helmet no steez” also applies to biking. Buy a NEW one, not second hand. Crashed helmets may look fine, but they may not have the structural integrity to protect you anymore. Also get MIPS
2. **Lock:** Never leave your bike unlocked, it’s easy for someone to pick it up and go! You WILL NOT outrun a bike.
3. **Bell:** Bikes are legally required to have bells. It’s also incredibly useful when passing pedestrians or signalling to other bikers you’re around!
4. **Front / back lights:** Even if you don’t anticipate being out at night, it’s good to have it on the off chance you’re accidentally out later than you meant to be.

### **Road safety**

Never had anyone to teach you how to ride safely around a busy city? There are specific road rules you can follow to stay safe. Here’s a list of resources to get you confident on the roads:

Vancouver’s website has a lot of tips for staying safe on the road, I recommend starting here: <https://vancouver.ca/guides/cycling.aspx>

Bike Kitchen’s Bike Buddy Program. This is a commute and mentorship program aimed at pairing you with an experienced cyclist to help create a safe route from your place to wherever you need to go!

Bike Hub also has some programs you can take a look at! <https://bikehub.ca/education/streetwise-cycling-education>

### **Prevent theft**

- **Buy a U-lock:** Don’t play around with your lock! A bike is an expensive thing to lose. Kryptonite, OnGuard, Abus are all reputable brands, although more expensive. Cable locks are easy to cut through, so consider a U-lock first.
- **Park smart:** Unfortunately, locks won’t stop all thieves. Lock your bike next to bikes that are less securely locked to make your bike less of a target.
- **Lock your frame:** Ever seen a random wheel attached to a post downtown? Never lock just your wheel, this can be taken off your bike! Ideally, lock both your frame and a wheel!

## VOCJ68

- 529 Garage: An app where you can register your bike, so police know who to return it to once retrieved! They partner with law enforcement to help stop bike theft.

### Storage Options

*If you live in residence:*

- A lot of suites have bike hooks in the room, so if you have a single bedroom check around!
- Some residences, like Ponderosa, have shared bike storage garages in the buildings.

*If you don't:*

- Bike Keep racks: These are around campus, you can lock your bike through an app! <https://bikekeep.com/>
- Bike lockers: There are lockers designated around campus, and UBC sells these permits for \$240/year.
- Bike cages: These are secure enclosures that are accessible by multiple permit holders. These are free and located all over campus!

### Maintenance:

There are bike maintenance stations with pumps and tools around campus, so you can adjust your bike in a pinch. For larger maintenance, you can go to the Bike Kitchen, which offers cheap hours where you can come in and get help working on your bike, with all tools accessible. If you volunteer for 10 hours, you can also get these for free! Other bike refurbishing stores also offer similar hours. Ride On Again offered to help me fix up my bike if there were any problems with it in the near future, and came with a warranty.

### Public Transit

Getting your bikes onto the bus sounds really intimidating at first. It doesn't have to be, though! At UBC, we have a practice rack at the UBC bus loop, so you can practice before taking it onto a real bus. Also, if you arrive a few minutes early, the bus drivers are nice and can give you pointers if you need help. Make sure to let the bus driver know when you're getting off!

As for the Skytrain, there are specific carts that allow bikes. Look for the signs! Note that during rush hour, bikes may not be allowed.

More Resources

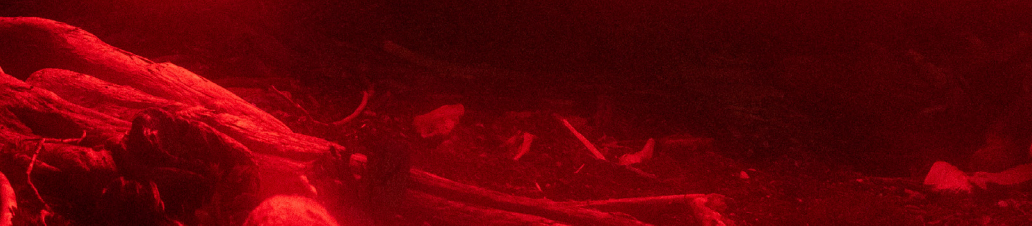
You're all set with the basics! If you're interested in learning more, here are some more resources:

<https://bikehub.ca/>

<https://www.thebikekitchen.ca/resources>

# CLUBLIFE, WORKHIKES, AND REFLECTIONS

VOC



## **Looking Back on 13 Years in The VOC**

*Cassandra Elphinstone*

**I**t's been 13 years since I joined the VOC and it has played a huge role in my life—larger than I ever imagined it would. As I move to Norway, I find myself reflecting on the inspiring, beautiful, terrifying, and sad experiences I've had and the amazing people I have met along the way. Without the VOC, its trips, people, and character, I'm not sure I would have stayed at the ivory towers of the university so long. Here is a collection of memories that stand out to me.

### **Learning about the VOC**

I'm on a small ledge, a couple feet wide, on a cliff next to a small waterfall. Next to me is a severely injured man that we have just rappelled down to. He has a flail chest with six of his ribs broken twice each, collapsing one lung. He is no longer completely conscious and mumbles that he is sorry for falling. This is my high school English teacher, the person who has taught me the most about climbing and backpacking to this point. I'm in shock and not much help. My legs shake when I get up to try to fill a water bottle from the waterfall next to us. I grip the heather on the ledge, a plant I will eventually study for my PhD, smelling it strongly as I break some stems. The other person sitting next to me is Dave Campbell, a past VOCer. He takes the lead, asking John Young basic questions to keep him awake while he patches the cuts on his head. There is not much we can do ourselves about his broken chest and the blood he coughs up.

It's two weeks before I start university at UBC. I've just turned 18 and am on my first weeklong backpacking traverse with Dave and John, two older ACCers in their mid-forties. Over the last two days, Dave has been telling me about this amazing club called the VOC that I should look for when I get to UBC. We are attempting to climb six peaks between the Elk River Valley and Buttle Lake on Vancouver Island. Earlier that day, we had summited Rambler Peak, then began descending, looking across at the Golden Hinde. But now

**Section cover** Sri Chaitanya

John—or, Mr. Young, as I referred to him—had slipped on the snow, did not self-arrest, and slid off a cliff. By pure luck, after falling about 70 m, he landed on this ledge rather than falling another few hundred meters down nearly vertical terrain.

This is the first trip I've ever been on with a satellite emergency communication device and I'm so glad we have it. It's a SPOT allowing us to send an SOS message with a position but not much more. We press the emergency SAR button and wait. After what feels both like an eternity and no time at all, a helicopter flies over the cliff and our ledge, spotting the bright sleeping mat Dave is waving. The terrain is too steep, though, so after a quick look they fly off. We hold our breath, unsure what will happen next. It's 3:00 pm and John will not make it through the night. Will they reach us before dark?

Then, another much larger helicopter appears. They hover above us and long line paramedics and a stretcher down to us. Dave wants the two of us to continue the trip but at least one person must go with John, as he is concussed and unsure of who he is. I'm relieved to hear that the paramedics want both of us to come with them. We gather our gear and get winched into the machine. I've never flown in a helicopter. John immediately goes into surgery in Comox. Dave and I sit tense in the hospital waiting room, watching the opening ceremony for the Summer Olympics on TV, showing James Bond and Queen Elizabeth being winched into a helicopter. "In 30 years of mountaineering," Dave says, "I've never seen an accident like that." A couple hours later, John has beaten the odds and survived the surgery. We breathe a huge sigh of relief.

**Photo** Rescue *Cassandra Elphinstone*



### **My first VOC trip**

Two weeks later, as a first-year undergrad starting at UBC, I don't feel like I belong at the university. The parties, sorority invitations, and first-year cafeterias were overwhelming after witnessing the accident a couple weeks earlier. I needed to find some people who go out into the mountains regularly and understand their dangers. I headed for the VOC clubroom looking for the club that Dave had recommended. There was a trip called G2 (Glacier School) that planned to go up the Anniversary Glacier and summit Matier and Slalok Mountains in the Joffre Range. A part of me was terrified to go back into the mountains but I also felt this need to. I didn't have any experience on glaciers but I had a basic understanding of ropes—that's enough, right? No, probably not, but I signed up anyway.

Fisal Elstone picked me up at 5 am from Totem Park. We were leaving extra early to avoid the GranFondo bike race closure of the Sea to Sky Highway. I was unbelievably excited and my excitement only grew as we drove across the Lions Gate Bridge and people shared stories of climbing the bridge and paddling through the heat vents under the university. In the parking lot for Keith's Hut, everyone looked skeptically at my heavy, meter-long ice axe and my dad's old heavy steel crampons. Despite this, I was confident I could self-arrest after falling and successfully stopping only a couple weeks before on Rambler Peak. We camped at Motel 66 at the end of the Anniversary Glacier. The next morning, an alpine start got us to the glacier early enough to realize we had forgotten the rope and still had to go back to retrieve it. After a quick race back to camp, we headed up Matier. My instructors patiently showed me how to tie my first alpine butterfly and tie my Prusik knot onto the rope (likely annoyed that I had skipped G1). When I got home, I practiced the knots for hours, determined to learn.

### **Photo** Heading up Matier



Most people opted to climb the steep snow/ice, but I could not bring myself to be on steep snow, with visions of Mr. Young's recent slip on snow. Instead I scrambled up the rock next to them. It felt amazing to be back in the mountains. From the top, I could see peaks stretching out in every direction. I wanted to climb them all!

### **Roland Burton**

About a month later, I had just failed my first midterm as an undergrad in Science One. Keen for a distraction, I walked into the VOC clubroom. It was not the current clubroom in the Nest or even the one before that, in the basement of the SUB (now the Life Building) across from the old Sprouts Cafe. This was three clubrooms ago, a small windowless room at the very back of the SUB. A curtain split the gear from a small area with couches. Only quartermasters went behind the curtain to bring out gear for people to try on. An older man sat on one of the couches. I watched as he dug around in the couch and pulled out a twenty dollar bill. "Ah," he said, "It's amazing this club of disorganized students can function." As he put it back in the folder of money, I realized how much the VOC relies on (and often but not always gets) honourable and trustworthy behaviour that is hard to find elsewhere in the world.

### **Learning to ski**

In late November, Steph Grothe posted a beginner-friendly backcountry skiing trip to Red Heather. "No experience needed" the trip agenda post said. It was perfect. I wandered into the clubroom looking for skins to fit my dad's old cross country touring skis. Fisal from G2 was there. After a quick look at the skis, he handed me a bag of short and skinny skins. "These don't fit any club skis now. You can have them." The club runs not only on honour and trust but also on a huge generosity of time and equipment!

Arriving at Red Heather, I quickly noticed that the other 30 people did not have cross country skis or leather boots like mine but downhill-like skis with cables and fancy plastic boots. How much do skis and boots differ really? Over the next decade I would find out: they differ a lot. I met and skied up with Ross Campbell who was also new to the club. Once at the warming shelter, a kind experienced skier offered to take us beginners without avalanche gear (Ross, Jens Vent-Schmidt, Ruanne Lai, and I) to ski on the bunny hill right above the hut. The snow was deep powder. Our leader pointed his skis downhill and zoomed off. I tried to do the same, but my skis crossed and I fell over. This was hard!

I returned to the city covered in bruises, exhausted, and unsure about skiing, but keen to get out in the snow again. After a spring VOC trip to the Three Brothers on which I spent the majority of the time carrying my skis and running through knee-deep powder trying to keep up with everyone, people



## Photo

Learning to ski

said, “Get some tele skis from the club, it will really help.”

A year later, it was Stephanie Grothe’s birthday and equipped with tele skis for the first time, I struggled up to Phelix Hut, the first VOC hut I had visited. We had Feuerzangenbowle as a birthday celebration. I watched the sugar cone burn and slowly drip sugar into the mulled wine with a beautiful wintery scene out the window behind. Sam Viavant and I skied up to the upper lake and I felt like I was living in a winter wonderland. I walked down the trail the next day but attempted to ski some of the logging road. Julien Renard and Steph watched as I went over a water bar, nearly making it up the other side before falling over backwards. They hid their smiles well and patiently walked down the end of the road with me. “You will learn,” they said. Although it took years, eventually they were right.

A couple months later, it was reading break and Roland’s birthday. We headed up to the hut he built in Sphinx Bay on Garibaldi Lake. The rangers ran into us on the switchbacks and asked where we were going. They were clearly worried that we had no idea how far it was to the warming shelter at the lake. Roland played ignorant along with their expectations. “I heard there was a hut somewhere across the lake. Is there?” “I’m not sure,” the ranger replied, looking worried.

Although Gabe Frame and Carly Petersen joined us for the switchbacks and a first night at Taylor Meadows, it was just the two of us that crossed the lake the next morning. Crossing Garibaldi Lake was my dream skiing—flat, no trees to hit, endless unploughed snow, and fast travel. Roland patiently showed me how to ski up the Garbage Pile behind the hut and navigate the switchbacks down. “You should do the Garibaldi Névé traverse,” he said, pointing at the glaciers rolling above the lake.

A few weeks later, I signed up for an ACC trip going across the Garibaldi Névé. I was still a terrible skier and fell continuously every 10 m or so going downhill. However, the magnificent seracs, rocky peaks, and beauty of the alpine in winter were enchanting. Physically, it was the hardest and most beautiful trip I had ever done to that point and after a couple weeks of recovery

(truly Type 2 fun), I decided that I wanted to do more ski traverses.

A month or so later, a weeklong trip to ski across the Misty Icefield was posted on the VOC trip agenda. After encouragement from Steph, Clemens Adolphs, Julien, and Neil Mackenzie, I applied to go. The water taxi got cancelled at the last minute though, so they changed to a more challenging 90 km traverse. The new plan was to cross the northern half of Garibaldi Park from Pemberton (Mount Currie) to the south end of Lillooet Lake (Nivalis Peak), linking the Wedge-Currie traverse to part of the Spearhead and part of the McBride. This trip pushed me to my limits but also taught me a lot about how to do longer ski traverses. I really appreciated this opportunity to learn and I continue to try to pass on these skills that I learned to future VOCers.

### **Avalanches**

On the second last day of the trip, below Nivalis Peak, the glaciers had retreated tremendously. I was exhausted having been trying to keep up with everyone for six days already and was deeply grateful for their patience. One by one, we needed to ski down an unexpected 35-degree slope, left by the retreating glacier and thus not on our maps. We could see avalanches coming down in places all around us. Luckily, the first people in the group safely ski cut the slope so it had already slid by the time I was on it. I decided to side step down as I still could not link two turns on anything over 20 degrees. In total, it was probably about a 100 m descent but it was steep enough that when I misstepped, I fell, tomahawking down the slope to the bottom. I was fine, relieved to be at the bottom and a bit shaken. Everyone was surprised I had not broken anything.

We could see the snow was still unstable in the warm spring sun but we needed to climb up to the ridge above us to be able to exit the next day. We started up, one by one, spaced out in case anything slid. I was at the back exhausted by the fall and skiing in general. Partway up the slope, I fell while kick turning, which triggered the slope above me. I was swept down the mountain for about 70 m through a couple of trees. I can still remember the sound of the snow roaring and then slowing to a quiet trickle. I was only slightly buried, my head was out, and I was fine. We dug out my poles and slowly headed up the debris. I felt so lucky to be alive.

Two weeks had passed since I had gotten back from the ski traverse across the northern part of Garibaldi Park. Physically, I was in good shape other than my nine black toenails that were slowly falling off. However, I was still quite shaken by the feeling of being pulled down the mountain in an avalanche. I could not stop reliving the experience. I was headed to Ellesmere Island for my first summer of fieldwork in the Arctic. We stopped in Resolute Bay waiting for good weather to fly into our field site at Alexandra Fiord. I sat in my room at midnight staring out the window at the midnight sun. It felt surreal to be there and to be alive. My father told me to appreciate the present moment and

that is what I tried to do. However, when I had time to think, I found myself in the avalanche again, being swept down the mountain.

The summer fieldwork was beautiful. On my 20th birthday, my supervisor asked where I would like to go if I could go anywhere. “Right here,” I said. Standing outside one evening under the midnight sun, while brushing my teeth, I saw an upside down rainbow in the sky. It was beautiful and backwards, capturing a wonderful character of this trip. Slowly over the years, the recurring memory of the avalanche faded, but my reminder to appreciate every moment did not.

### **The VOC exec**

The next year, I attended a VOC potluck and Caitlin Schneider, Julien, Steph and Clemens told me to join the exec. I was unsure as I was so much younger than everyone on exec, but they were so encouraging that I applied to be a quartermaster.

Exec meetings and gear hours were a temporary escape into the world of the mountains without the time required for a full trip. I loved attending. As a quartermaster and second-year student, I didn’t know the inner workings of the club yet and was content to come each week and listen to older VOCers debate everything from film festival partnerships to outhouse designs. I was blissfully unaware how many times these same conversations had happened before and would happen again. For me, it was all new.

### **Death**

I knew the mountains can be deadly, but knowing a fact is not experiencing it. We were sitting in a second-year physiology class when Gabe Frame and I got an email that Steph, Neil, and Elena Cernicka had fallen while simul-climbing and died on Joffre Peak. It was January 2015 and the world of the VOC had changed forever. We sat in shock as the class went on around us.

I couldn’t quite believe it. I had last seen Steph right before Christmas at the clubroom. She had given me a hug and wished me merry Christmas. I remember thinking “I hope I can be like her someday.” Now she is gone, but her memory lives on in trips and people. The VOC organized a celebration of life at the university a few weeks after the accident. People stepped up to run the trips that Neil had posted including Daughter of Ice and Burns and Turns. None of it felt like it was enough, but what else could we do?

### **People**

“He’s infamous,” Tianna Sturdy said.

We were looking through the list of people we had managed to recruit to help with Intro to Backcountry. It was late January 2015 and the first larger VOC trip after Steph and Neil’s memorial. The mountains are a comforting place for me. After their deaths, I needed a trip. Many others in our community did too.

“Why is he infamous?” I asked.

“I don’t know exactly. For one, he convinced tons of people to follow him down the wrong FSR skiing to Brew.” Oh well, we needed instructors, so I emailed the infamous Tom Curran asking him to come help.

In the parking lot, everyone got together and I was surprised to realize I had seen Tom Curran before. It had been on the bus only a couple weeks prior. He got on the bus with an enormous tupperware of steel cut oats wearing a climbing helmet for biking. I immediately suspected he was part of the VOC. He spent the next twenty minutes telling the person he had sat next to (and most of the rest of the back of the bus) the wonders of steel cut oats. He was convincing enough that I went out and bought steel cut oats that week. As a terrible cook, and not realizing that the oats needed to be cooked longer than instant oats, I was unimpressed with their texture. On Intro to Backcountry, Tom managed to not get anyone lost and we discussed the potential for a plan to ski across the Pemberton Icefield that spring.

### **Injuries**

Two months later, I tore my ACL while Tom, Isabel Verse, and I were in the middle of the Pemberton Icefield. We discussed what to do. The snowpack was terribly unstable and we could hear avalanches all around. I was convinced I could make it out but they were worried. In the end, I convinced them it would be alright and we started at 2 am. We skied 25 km out to Callaghan Lake. It was miserable. I could not put much weight on my leg without a lot of pain. When we reached Ring Lake, one of Tom’s skis flew off his foot and into the center of the half-frozen lake. We belayed Isabel out onto the soft ice to retrieve the ski. Isabel and Tom took the heavy gear from my pack for some of the steep skiing down through the trees to reach the cross country ski trails. When we finally got to the parking lot, we were overjoyed to find some guys with a truck willing to give us a ride to Whistler in the morning. I was fairly sure Tom and Isabel would never want to do a trip with me again. Little did I know that two years later, Tom and I would start dating and now, ten years later, we have bought a place together.

The doctor told me I did not need surgery immediately as my muscles would compensate for the missing ACL. I did my physio exercises and tried to learn to walk and then to ski again. However, three years later, Tom and I were hiking on the Howe Sound Crest trail when I tore my meniscus. I was longlined out from Mount Brunswick to Lions Bay, and then rode in an ambulance to Lions Gate Hospital. This brought back a fresh wave of memories of injuries and helicopter adventures. The surgeon said I needed knee surgery to repair the ACL and meniscus and prevent future injuries. Although I was worried about surgery, I was also desperate to ski again. Surgery and a year of physio got my leg to a condition like pre-2015. Now, years later, I would not know I

had injured my knee. To those of you with injuries—it can eventually get better!

### **New VOCers**

Since these first few years in the VOC, I have actually learned how to link some turns, led trips all over the mountains in the Sea to Sky region, met hundreds of new VOCers, spent a couple weeks meditating alone in the mountains, spent a year as VOC president, and many years as Huts and Trails Coordinator. However, in a strange way these new experiences and people all reflect what I saw in those first years in the club. The people I have met are each so unique and yet there are patterns that reoccur again and again. The trust, generosity, curiosity, excitement, fear, and inspiration reoccur each generation.

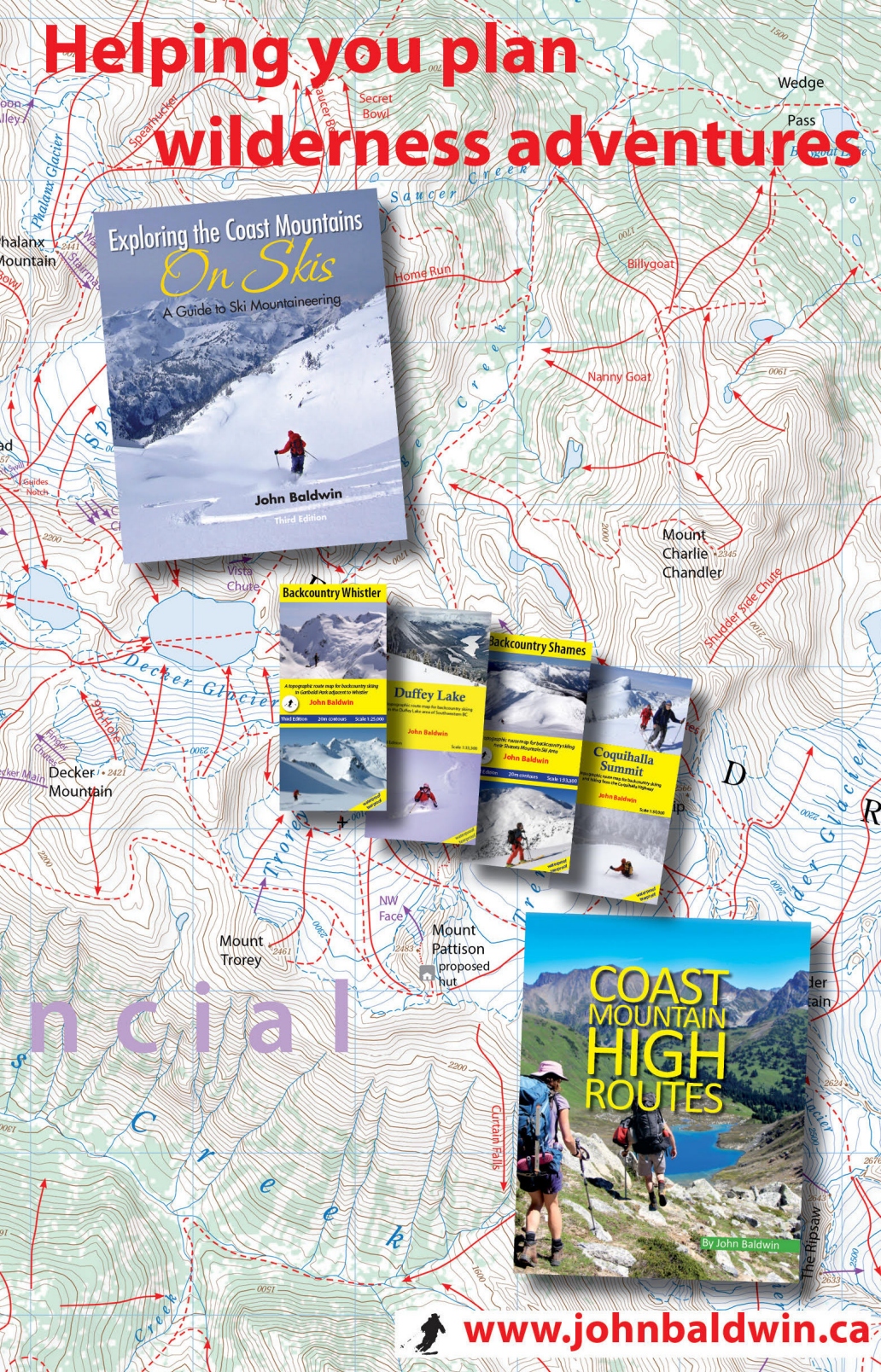
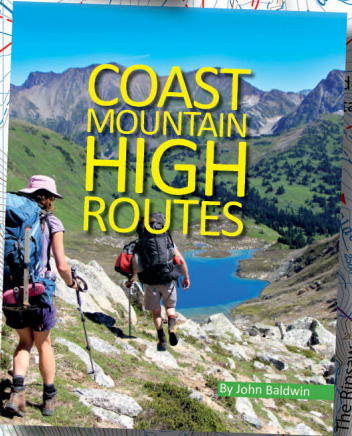
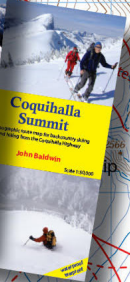
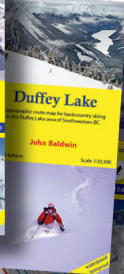
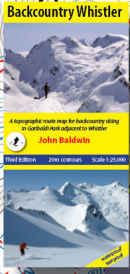
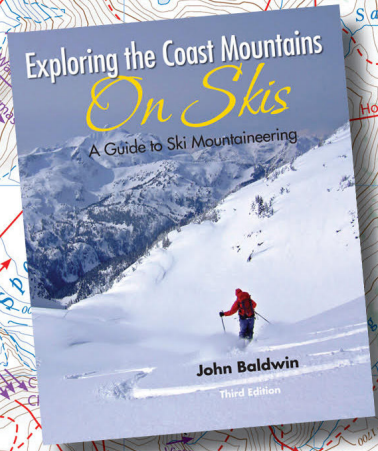
Even now, 13 years later, I still know and do trips with so many people that I met from my first few years in the VOC. Although the types of trips with them have changed and often involve kids, it is so special to still be able to get outside together. On current VOC trips, I feel old but I enjoy watching all the new people step up to run exciting trips and take beginners on grand adventures, reminding me of my first trips.

Some things do change. The VOC used to swim nude at clothed beaches (Locarno) and now swim clothed at a nude beach (Wreck). We used to climb all sorts of buildings on campus but now fear leaving the Aviary for G1 rope ascension. There is still a lot of expertise in the club but also more fear of breaking rules, making mistakes, and a desire for structure/control on trips that used to be what VOCers shied away from in other clubs. These shifts are probably in part a reflection of societal changes beyond the VOC.

Although I have managed to avoid involuntary helicopter rides and new serious injuries myself, multiple friends have died and I have seen many more accidents in the mountains. The more trips you do, the higher the chances are that you see an injury. However, I agree with Dave Campbell that I still have not personally seen as bad an accident as the one on Rambler Peak all those years ago, even after more than a hundred trips with hundreds of different people. I'm glad I kept doing trips in the mountains.

The VOC is an amazing and unusual club. If you have been around for a while, you know this. You have your own memories and close friendships that form when people experience stressful situations and are challenged together. If you are new to the club—welcome and enjoy! I hope you feel like you belong outside either now or after you have spent some years in the club. It will not be easy but if I could go and relive my experiences in the VOC, the good and the bad, I would. They have shaped me, far more than any university courses I took. Compared to the bureaucracy and ivory towers of the university, the mountains will challenge you, not judge you, and give you experiences you will not forget. Enjoy learning new skills, struggling with hard trips, meeting a variety of people, and visiting each new place (as it will only be new once).

# Helping you plan wilderness adventures



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**Above**

Cassandra at camp 4.  
*Declan Taylor*

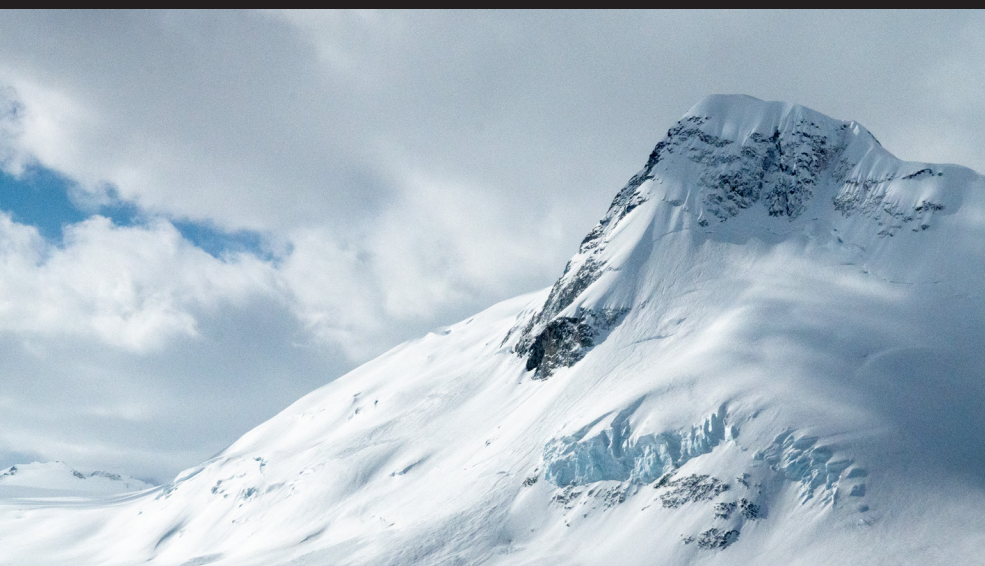


**Left**

Lunch Rock!  
*Declan Taylor*

**Below**

Mt. Satan seracs.  
*Declan Taylor*



# **NMAG - The Monarch Icefield: It's all About Solar Radiation (or the lack thereof)**

*Cassandra Elphinstone, Zoe Neudorf, and Lucas Braun*

*April 26th-May 20th, 2025*

*Monarch Icefield*

*Participants: Zoe Neudorf, Declan Taylor, Lucas Braun, Tom Curran, and  
Cassandra Elphinstone*

**M**y heart is pounding. My intuition tells me something is not right, but I cannot determine what. I'm standing on a 40-degree snow slope, ice axe in hand. Above and below are cliffs. Somewhere at the top of the slope Zoe Neudorf, Declan Taylor, Lucas Braun and Tom Curran are digging snow pits while I wandered down without skis to check we are in the right place to ski down. The snow is deep powder in places and then ice in others. Through the clouds, I can see the slope gets steeper ahead and there are many more cliffs, but it looks like it will go. I turn around to start heading up. My heart is still racing. I remind myself that we dug an avalanche pit the day before, lower on the icefield, and the snowpack looks like it is stabilizing after storms caused widespread instability. Here at 2,500 m, something feels strange though. Maybe it is just the thought of skiing a 40-degree slope with cliffs below, but I suspect it is something more. I'm nearly at the top when I hear Declan call out. I freeze, but he beckons to me to come up quickly. When I reach him, he says he heard the whole slope whoomph just now. The whoomphing sound comes from the collapsing of a weak layer in the snowpack and is a sign of high avalanche danger. You don't ever want to hear it on a steep slope. We carefully make our way over to a safer spot away from the slope and join Zoe, Lucas and Tom. At this moment, Tom steps out of the pit he has been digging, and we all hear another loud whoomph.

It is difficult to summarize a month-long trip in a few paragraphs and even a summary of what happened each day does not capture the impact this month of skiing on a remote icefield had for each of us. Initially, our team was composed of Jacob Grossbard, Declan Taylor, Zoe Neudorf, Tom Curran and myself but when the end of March came around and Jacob's foot was still bothering him from a previous ski injury, we recruited Lucas Braun to join our trip. Our plan was to ski the Monarch-Ha-iltzuk traverse: 200 km from Bella Coola to the head of Knight Inlet, crossing some of the most beautiful icefields in British Columbia's Coast Mountains. We would spend 30 days on the icefields: skiing, climbing, and offering ourselves up to the experience of travelling through some of the most isolated terrain in the Pacific Range. The idea had grown out of an interest all of us had in doing a longer ski traverse. In May 2025, with Cassandra and Zoe finishing school, and the remainder of the group in suitably flexible employment situations, we realized the time was right to get out on a much dreamed of month-long ski traverse.

We applied for multiple grants to help sponsor the expedition. Originally, we had contemplated a traverse closer to Vancouver, linking up smaller ski trips between all of the VOC's huts. This was more within our budget, but after getting grants to do a longer remote trip, we eagerly took the opportunity. The Neil Mackenzie Adventure Grant (from the VOC and the Neil Mackenzie Trust) and the Jenn Higgins Grant (from the Alpine Club of Canada) supported the trip. Without their support, as a group, we would not have been able to afford to do such a long and remote trip. The Jenn Higgins Grant supports women doing outdoor expeditions in Canada. Both Zoe and I were excited to apply as we knew of many all-male teams but only had heard about one other woman who had completed the whole 200 km Monarch-Ha-iltzuk traverse.

The trip was filled with firsts for everyone. For Lucas, Declan, and Zoe, it was their first ski traverse longer than four days. For Tom and me, it was three times longer than the longest ski trip we had ever done. It was also all of our first times making a food cache or doing a trip intentionally involving a helicopter. In total, we made and dehydrated 150 days of meals (5 people x 30 days) following amazing recipes from Declan and Zoe. We made multiple Costco runs with Haley Foladare and Jacob Grossbard and purchased 20 liters of white gas cooking fuel. The first 10 days of food we carried with us and the other 20 days we left for Tom to fly in (half as a food cache and half flown directly to us).

Before the trip, I spent a lot of time imagining what could potentially go wrong and possible solutions. We might have days of poor weather, or we might be unable to find our food cache. Someone might get injured and need an evacuation. Someone might get caught in an avalanche, fall into a crevasse, or even die. Surprisingly, once we had set off on the trip, I never imagined that we might not complete the traverse. In some ways, I think I had become

accustomed to shorter trips such as the Garibaldi Neve traverse closer to Vancouver, which I have done so many times I have lost count. Trips like the Neve can be done in terrible weather by planning the trip around the conditions such that you ski on the worst slopes at still reasonably safe times. However, large remote icefields and longer trips with many unfamiliar cruxes do not allow for the same ability to carefully choose when to begin each section of the trip.

### **Zoe and Cassandra's perspectives**

On April 26th, we set off from Nanaimo. It was two days after I had successfully defended my PhD thesis, and I was so excited to be heading out on a month-long trip! My mom drove Lucas and I up to the northern part of Vancouver Island to the town of Port Hardy where we could catch a ferry to Bella Coola. Zoe and Declan were moving to Port McNeil and thus already had a full car. Tom and Anya Boardman were our base in Vancouver for the start of the trip. The plan was about 10 days into the traverse, Tom would fly in to join us by helicopter from the Chilcotin Plateau but first drop a food cache on the Ha-iltzuk Icefield (containing 10 days of food, our running shoes for the bushwhack exit, a drone for filming, and a beacon for locating the cache). Anya was our communication point in the city. She checked weather for us, looked into options for rides out of the Knight Inlet, and helped with all our many logistics. Thank you!

After checking our skis to Bella Bella, we boarded the ferry and tried to find a good place to sleep. It was 6 pm. At 1 am, we would arrive in Bella Bella and at 3 am we would catch another water taxi to Bella Coola. I found it hard to sleep with the excitement and anticipation of the days ahead, but after our late-night layover in Bella Bella, I fell asleep for the first half of the water taxi ride to Bella Coola. I woke up as it got light. We motored between islands and through the fiords. The water was turquoise coloured by the spring glacial runoff and the peaks were snowcapped, reminding me that soon we would be up there on skis! It felt magical to wake up on a boat like this, when only three days earlier I had been defending my PhD at UBC.

When we arrived in Bella Coola, we were picked up by Declan's friend from an Avalanche Operations Level 1 ski guiding course, Bryn. Bryn generously let us nap at his place. We had a decision to make, the first of many on the trip. Should we start skiing now or wait for the forecasted rain to pass? We had about 12 km to ski to the ridge on Polar Bear Peak, the first crux of our trip. If we started now and then camped, we would be about 7 km closer to the crux if conditions were suitable. If the forecast was right, this would position us to reach the crux earlier the day after the rainstorm. We hoped with an earlier start the snowpack would be frozen solid after a forecasted clear night allowing the snow to refreeze.

Gratefully accepting a ride from our friend, Bryn, we were delivered to the first avalanche path blocking the gravel road about 2 km from the Ham-

## VOCJ68

mer Lake trailhead. At 6 pm we started skinning up and were mostly able to ski from the road. Our packs were not light. Ranging from 65–80 lbs with ten days of food and glacier gear, we were looking forward to reaching the glaciers where we could transfer some of the load to our sleds. As the sun slowly set, we found ourselves following the footsteps of a navigationally talented grizzly bear, luckily heading in the opposite direction to us. Each time we lost the trail, we would wander around until we saw the grizzly tracks and found ourselves right back on route. Arriving at midnight, we set up our tents on the edge of Hammer Lake, hung the best bear hang we could, and cozied up in our sleeping bags. The next day, as planned, we napped in the rain and listened to the sounds of multiple wet loose avalanches coming down the slopes across from us.

At 2 am the next morning, we tested the snow outside our tents and found no crust had formed, likely because of the still cloudy weather. With mixed emotions, we crawled back into our sleeping bags for a bit more sleep. At 4 am a quick check of the snow showed it had refrozen. We hurriedly packed, ate our chocolate digestive cookies and began skinning up towards Polar Bear Peak. After boot packing up a small section of steeper snow on the shoulder of Polar Bear Peak where some of us used crampons, we reached the shoulder around 9 am. A shallow avalanche pit to test the snow stability at the top had good results. The light was flat so we slowly felt our way down and over the shoulder of the peak into the basin below. Soon our legs were burning from the breakable crust and our heavy traverse packs loaded with nine days of food.

**Photo** Skiing to Ape Lake. *Declan Taylor*



After descending about 400 m, we realized lower down the snowpack had warmed a lot more than we had anticipated based on our snow pit on the shoulder. Declan, our brave leader, slipped into a glide crack and set off a size 1 slushy wet loose avalanche. We all nervously followed his tracks until we reached safer forested terrain. After about an hour of skiing through wet slush, we found a safe place to camp in the trees at a little lake. We spent the afternoon again watching dozens of wet loose avalanches fall down the slopes around us. Aiming to avoid this mid-morning warming the next day, after an early dinner, we retired to our tents around 6 pm.

The next day, we reached Ape Lake and the start of the glaciated terrain. Not wanting a midday start up an unknown glacier, we spent the afternoon lounging in the sun and bathing in the partly frozen lake. We assembled and tested our sleds, eager to take some weight off our backs. Before heading to bed, Zoe and I skinned up to the toe of the Fyle's Glacier. Using a probe we found the snow to be powdery and only 75cm thick on top of the glacial ice. I had hoped for a deeper snowpack - the thin layer encouraged us to again start early the next morning to ascend higher while it was still cold to where I hoped we would find deeper snow.

The third 2 am start in a row had us a little rougher for wear. Although roped up, we were happy to be able to weave through the crevasses and over solid snowbridges without too much worry. At 1,800 m, the snowpack was three meters deep and we felt safer in our wanderings. By late morning, we had reached the Jacobson Col where we could see the Monarch Icefield on one side stretching out before us and look back down on the Fyle's Glacier towards Ape Lake where rows and rows of intimidating looking peaks reached into the distance. Next came our first ski descent with sleds on the trip! These behaved rather like small dogs, and we happily raced them downhill as they bounded down behind us. After navigating a small crevasse field, we dropped onto the Monarch Icefield and set up camp looking at Mount Satan.

Although we debated trying to find a way up Mount Satan, multiple alpine starts in a row and a lack of visibility made us content to take a couple rest days. We dug a snow pit to look at layers and happily noted the stabilized snow pack. Now a week into our trip, we eagerly awaited Tom's arrival with our food resupply.

After two cloudy days with variable visibility, we woke early to clear skies and stomped out a helicopter landing spot for Tom and our food resupply. We had sent Tom two waypoints - one where we were and one where we hoped to get to by the end of the day. Soon we heard a helicopter in the distance. However, instead of coming towards us we saw a small puff of snow on the horizon. Puzzled as to what was going on, we watched as the helicopter took off in the distance leaving a tiny dot, that we assumed to be Tom and our food resupply, on the ice. We gathered our gear and set out to meet him. It

was a beautiful sunny day, and we enjoyed skiing with light packs across the icefield. When we arrived, Tom welcomed us with two blueberry cheesecakes. He had also brought in our new Mega Mid tent, a pyramid cook tent that would turn out to be extremely helpful in all the storms that would follow his arrival. Declan showed us how to dig out the cook tent and we all enjoyed our first dinner in a week sheltered from both the sun and wind.

The next morning, we woke to intermittent visibility in and out of the clouds. Tom tested out his new skis and skins for the first time, and we were relieved to see they worked. After a quick ski down from a ridge near camp, the weather seemed to clear a bit, and we decided to climb Erehwon ('no-where' spelt backwards). It was about 4 km from our camp. After a couple of kilometers of flat icefield, we crossed a small, mostly filled bergschrund. Then we skied onto the summit ridge and bootpacked the last couple meters to the summit.

When the clouds cleared, the views of Cerberus and Monarch mountains were spectacular! Mount Cerberus looked terrifying to climb. It is where Brian Waddington, a former VOC president, died back in the 1990s at a time where multiple VOCers also died on the Monarch Icefield on three separate trips. From the top, we bum slid a short section back down to our skis and attempted to ski the occasionally breakable crust back to camp.

The next day we woke up to the worst storm yet. Until this point, although it had not been clear, it also had not been a full-on blizzard. We spent all day in the new Mega Mid, cooking, chatting and beginning to read Sam Viavant's draft book about climbers in Yosemite out loud. At some point, we went outside to find Lucas's tent collapsed, pancaked under the weight of all the new snow.

The next morning, the storm slowed down. By our measurements, it had snowed more than 40 cm. Lucas and I heard loud whoomping only a few meters out of camp which warned us that the storm snow has not bonded well to the warmer isothermal layers below. We started to head across the relatively flat Monarch Icefield towards Princess Peak and our next major crux. The crux at 2500 m involved a descending traverse down a 35 to 40 degree above and in places below cliffs – terrain we did not want to be on and hear any whoomphs.

The next few days were a blur of waiting. We were waiting for the snowpack to consolidate but the lack of direct sunlight, cold temperatures and a weak layer nearly half a meter down did not improve the situation. The northern aspects were worse than the south aspects based on the pits we dug. As the days went by, we heard less whoomping on the main icefield (2000 m) but we were unsure what we would find as we went higher to ski the crux at 2500 m.

One evening, after a day of exploring the icefield, Tom and Declan returned to camp towing a cute balloon bunny. We tied it to the mega mid that night but by morning it was gone. As a group, had we imagined it?

After a few days of exploring and waiting, we were running out of time to be able to reach our next food cache if we did not cross the crux soon. Still unsure of the snowpack, we decided to move camp closer and go look at the crux. As we got higher towards the crux with day packs, it turned into a warm day. Zoe, Lucas, and I turned back to camp to take a snow bath while the sun was out, while Tom and Declan continued toward the crux. They made it close to the crux, but it was so warm on a south-facing aspect so late in the day at 1 pm that they also headed back to camp. We heard multiple icefalls fall off the hanging glaciers and watched wet loose avalanches come down all afternoon. It was finally starting to look more like the spring freeze thaw conditions we were familiar with, instead of the winter-like conditions we had been dealing with since the storm. We decided if there was a solid refreeze overnight the snowpack might finally be more stable in the morning.

The next day we woke up to visibility that was in and out of whiteout. We did not want to miss our chance at doing the crux, so we quickly skied up the 300 m elevation from our camp. We were reasonably confident that the snowpack had stabilized. At lower elevations the weak layers in our pits had finally appeared well bonded. I decided to go take a closer look at the slope and boot packed down to make sure we were at the right starting place to rip skins and ski down.

My heart raced as I kicked steps into the snow. After a bit of exploring, I headed up. Near the top Declan had triggered a whoomph and Tom triggered another when we were all in a safe spot. We looked at Zoe, Lucas and Tom's pit on a more mellow slope and still found the weak layer 40 cm down. The snow at 2500 m appeared to have stayed much colder which may have prevented the layers from healing like they had lower down. The wind was howling and it was cold, as the sun had only just risen, so we decided to retreat a few hundred meters to discuss.

We had four options: hope the slope improved and try to ski it again tomorrow, cheat by calling a helicopter to take us somewhere past this crux, explore and maybe find another route around, or turn tail and return the way we had come, back to Bella Coola. Tom, Declan and I decided to go look at another potential route with more glacier travel and elevation but less avalanche risk around the crux while Zoe and Lucas would reach out to the helicopter company, White Saddle, to see how much it would cost to get a lift over the crux section.

To explore our route options, Tom, Declan and I skied up to a nearby col at 2600 m and then down into a gorgeous, glaciated valley. After weeks on the open expanses of the Monarch Icefield, it felt exciting to have steep peaks on all sides of us again. Skiing into the valley, Declan opened a small crevasse, so Tom and I followed around carefully. The snowpack in the wind-blown cols was less than a foot deep. Before long, we reached a large crevasse field. After a



## Top to bottom

**1** Dinner at camp 7.  
*Declan Taylor*

**2** Zoe and Lucas on the  
summit of Erewhon.  
*Tom Curran*

**3** Zoe and Lucas gaze at the Monarch.  
*Declan Taylor*

**4** Sunset at camp 5.  
*Declan Taylor*

bit of searching, we concluded there was no straightforward way through. With uncertain travel ahead and dwindling food supplies if the route did not work, we decided to give up on the alternate route.

By early afternoon, we had all met up again. Zoe and Lucas had determined that the helicopter flight over the crux was going to cost ~\$5,000 so we had eliminated the cheat and explore options. This left us with run or hope. We decided realistically hope was unlikely. The weather showed no signs of a significant warm up. In fact, the forecast was for more cold temperatures and eventually another storm. The weak layer that was 40 cm down would only be buried further, which might make it less likely to trigger but also even more consequential. After much discussion, we all decided really our only option was to turn around and ski back to Bella Coola. At this point we had four full days of food left and would need to travel ~60 to 70 km back to Bella Coola.

### **Switching to Lucas' perspective**

Our spirits were lifted the next morning. While the sadness of turning back still lingered, we were pleased to see a clear spring morning on the icefield. Perhaps inspired by the conditions, we elected to ski around the east side of Mount Dagon and see another side of the Monarch Icefield that we missed on the way in. After days of inching along at a snail's pace waiting for the crux to improve, we were finally permitted by the weather and terrain to haul ass. And haul ass we did.

Moving towards Mount Dagon from our camp seemed to be endless; each stride doing nothing to bring the pyramidal mountain forward. The only notable landmark on our journey was a set of wolverine tracks bisecting the icefield. It took hours of moving to reach it, but we were treated to a nice nunatak there to sit and have lunch on. As we ate, our clear blue morning got swallowed by clouds. The others did not seem overly concerned, mostly because Cassandra had predicted this day would be "a scorcher". By this point, however, I had no trust whatsoever in the forecast and felt a sense of impending doom in these clouds. So, I urged everyone to finish eating and return to our skis. They did not oblige right away. But I felt vindicated in my urgency by what happened next.

Climbing up the col between Dagon and Belial, we got hit by a barrage of wind and sleet. The sky turned a dark and menacing gray. While skiing towards Mount Azazel, our visibility plummeted completely. Skiing down from Azazel to the crevasse field at the bottom of it, the sleet that was falling became noticeably wetter. Tom and Cassandra refused to stop and transition below Azazel, which led to a visual that will permanently be burned into my memory.

Tom stood at the front of our merry band, crevasse string in hand, casting it like a madman while he herringboned his way up a small rise. Zoe stood behind him, I was behind her, and Declan and Cassandra were behind

me. A freezing rain hammered us from sideways. At one point, Zoe turned to me, and it looked like her rain jacket was dripping with wax. Morale was low by that point.

After a bit longer slogging through the deluge, we made it to a heli-skiing marker we remembered from our ski in. We vaguely remembered it being under Mt. Satan, but we figured it had to be a safe spot to camp – why else would they put a heli-skiing marker there?

Exhausted and wet, we set up our tents quickly and dove in, electing to have a quick dinner inside. At one point, the clouds parted, and we were greeted to a view of apartment-sized seracs hanging above our camp. This freaked us out, but after looking at CalTopo, we figured they were far enough away that we could probably spend one night under them. Is this the best decision we made on this traverse? No. But it would be far from the last hazard we'd experience getting back to Bella Coola.

The next morning it was cold and clear, a remarkable departure from the tempest of the evening before. We rolled out of our tents to view an orange sunrise peaking out above the Chilcotin Plateau. The seracs hanging off of Mt. Satan loomed menacingly above our camp. We packed up quickly and a tad somberly with the knowledge that this was our last day on the Monarch Icefield. Now more than two weeks later, the even more thinly covered Fyles Glacier lay ahead. Uncertainty about how to navigate this crux before the sun hit it with its full strength was on everyone's minds.

We began moving as a cloud rolled over the icefields, obscuring our views of the Jacobson-Mongol col and threatening to separate our views of each other. The snow was firm and supportive, and when we reached the base of the 400 m climb to the col, it demanded ski crampons to be put on. What followed was the most stunningly beautiful ski day of my life. The climb to the col was an icy blue canyon. Wind drifts of snow piled like sand dunes next to us. The towering rock walls of Mongol and Jacobson funneled us through the narrow rocky notch where we had had lunch more than two weeks before. At the top, we saw the sun poke over the ridge of Jacobson and transitioned for our descent from the icy world we had inhabited for so long.

Getting onto the Fyle's Glacier required an icy sidehill of nearly 45° that started above some cliff bands. With the early morning lighting, the snow lacked any sort of definition, which made for a harrowing experience. I went first and felt my legs shake not knowing what lay beneath me, or how well my edges would hold on the boilerplate slope. I sideslipped quite a ways, hoping that with the loss of elevation, the slope would mellow out. This did not appear to be happening quickly enough for my tastes, so I eventually committed to the line. After three or four turns, I was off the slope and down where the glacier flattened out. The slope that had seemed so terrifying from above was not very big when looked at from the bottom, though the start of the sidehill was a

no-fall zone. Zoe and Cassandra followed, then Declan and Tom. Rather than skiing down to where I was, they were much braver than I and kept side hilling, avoiding the flat slog I had to take to reach the point where the glacier starts to descend.

We regrouped and began our careful descent of the 1200 m glacier. Our fears of a slushy crevassed death trap on the Fyles were unfounded. The snow remained boilerplate and supportive the entire time, and any crevasses we encountered were easily avoidable and navigable. The ski down was heavenly.

Clouds rolled over the ice, with bright, crystal blue skies piercing through. Large crevasse fields were a backdrop to idyllic turns as we followed Zoe the 9 km back to the lake. Our last day on the Monarch Icefield yielded the sun and spring conditions that we were so desperately starving for.

The lake which we had crossed without much issue three weeks earlier was much sketchier looking as we made our way to the toe of the glacier. Tom convinced us that spring lakes are much stronger than they look. So, we gingerly took steps onto the ice to cross it and made it across unscathed (save for Tom, who then tried to cross another section of it and fell calf-deep into slush).

A sweltering bushwhack through alder followed a leisurely lunch in the most verdant glacial foreland we had ever seen. Ascending back to the base of the canyon we had skied down from Polar Bear Peak, we were awestruck by the trees that towered over us for the first time in nearly three weeks. We set up camp past a climate station, and all bathed in the creek, laughing as the grime and sweat of almost three weeks of glacier travel washed off into the frigid water.

May 15th was perhaps the most consequential day of our traverse after our turnaround decision. We needed to get over Polar Bear Peak that day, lest we be trapped by another incoming weather system and run out of food. We woke up at 3:00 am and quickly packed up, determined to squeeze every drop out of our short weather window.

Zoe, Declan, and I followed a straightforward path to the overlook over Polar Bear, while Tom and Cassandra decided to bootpack through a waterfall for reasons known only to them. We regrouped at the overlook and took note that the nope slope, an alternative to the high route over the shoulder that we planned, was quite devoid of snow. This was reassuring, as it told us that even if we got weathered in, we had a viable way out without mandatory avalanche exposure. It looked like a particularly heinous option. So, we elected to go back over Polar Bear peak, and to do so quickly before the weather system in the afternoon rolled in. We skied back down to our camp south of the peak and began the slow ascent of the trees that weeks ago had held a terrifying wet loose hazard.

We reached the debris of the slide paths we had triggered, and it registered for us just how steep the slope was here. We donned ski crampons

to try and ascend it, but it became very uncomfortably steep very fast. With our advice, Tom decided to go a different route than us, and took his skis off to attempt a boot pack. This proved to be a big mistake for him, as he had to spend double the time it took us as he kicked steps up the slope right next to a steep drop off.

Our calves were burning, and our legs were shaking by the time we reached a mellow area to regroup. We all agreed this was nearing the steepest thing we had ever skinned up. By then, the light was becoming a bit flatter as more clouds rolled in. Our clock was ticking.

It was a slog getting onto the ridge of Polar Bear Peak, climbing the 35 degree slope we had skied down so long ago. The light was quite flat by this point, so I kickturned based on the feel of the contours around me. At one point, I took off my ski crampons and nearly slid backwards over a convexity, which led to quite an adrenaline spike. But after about an hour, we were all on the ridge. And the storm was over us.

Skiing down the ridge was a harrowing experience. We knew that on our right, large cornices hung over an abyss, yet we could not see them. And on our left, rock fields poked up out of the snow, forcing us farther right. Declan skied first with the crevasse string, whipping it back and forth, looking for any sort of windlip. The rest of us side-slipped after him, moving from rock to rock to give our path any sort of definition. There are few places I like to be in a ping pong ball less than on a steep ridge.

Eventually, we reached the boot pack. We had naively hoped we might be able to ski it, but large boulders had melted out and bisected it now, which forced us to transition on a narrow ledge to boot down. It was quite stressful removing our traverse packs, taking out our ice axes, putting our skis on our packs, and putting the packs back on when we were balanced on a ledge about a foot wide and 6 feet long. Tom and Cassandra led the way down, kicking steps through the crust for the rest of us to use. At one point, Cassandra fell and got caught in a hole, which was quite lucky. Once we were back at a place to transition, the rest of the descent went smoothly. Declan, Zoe, and I skied down some really steep trees, and on an attempted jump turn, I managed to lose my balance and tumble down into a tree well. But I was able to self-extricate and put my skis back on. From there, we had a wet and wild time getting back to the Nusatsum FSR. Hammer Lake and the surrounding skin track were a swamp in the rain, and our skins suffered greatly.

However, soon we were back on the road, and setting our tents up to await pickup. And the feeling was bittersweet.

To see the road at the end of it all, hit like a freight train. A line now extended from our society of five to the rest of the world. What did it mean for us? Did following it mean the end of our civilization? Did following lead to our fated divergence from each other? Would anyone on the other side understand

anything we saw? In my experience with such matters, I knew they wouldn't. Yet we let these questions sit with us, not worrying about the answers. The road was a beautiful silver line through the rainforest, and all we thought about was what it would have looked like in Knight Inlet. One day soon, I hope to know.

In total we spent 20 days skiing through the mountains together. We covered about 170 km but nearly half of it was in the last four days. Justin, after learning through an InReach message to Sam Mackoy (an old VOCer) that we needed a ride down the Nusatrum FSR, generously drove up and picked us up. When we returned to Bella Coola, we dropped Declan at the ferry terminal to head to a kayak guiding course he had thought he would need to miss and then headed to a campground in Hagensborg, about 15 km inland from Bella Coola. After hot showers and laundry for the first time in three weeks, we feasted on steaks, fresh salads, vegetables and ice cream from the grocery store. At the end of the May long weekend, we hitchhiked out of Bella Coola to Tatla Lake. After Tom and Cassandra walked about 5 km up the logging road in ski boots towards Tom's car at White Saddle (our shoes are still on the icefield in the food cache), they got a second much appreciated ride to Mike King's place at White Saddle. After picking up the car, we drove back to Tatla Lake to pick up Lucas and Zoe. A quick visit with our friend Tom Smith in Williams Lake and then we found ourselves back in the bustle of city life.

None of us were strangers to being isolated in remote areas. Many people you talk to think it's lonely, being so cut off from the rest of the world. Yet the five of us would agree that your world just becomes smaller. Society becomes the people you eat next to, dig a latrine for, and stomp out a tent pad with. It becomes the people who mentor you, who laugh at you for wearing a flannel on a ski trip before gently correcting you, and the people that extend a hand so that you may join them in the clouds. Community becomes the knowledge that should you be buried alive, those around you will dig you out. Should you fall in a crevasse, a rescue loop is coming. And it becomes the certainty and confidence that you will do the same for them. Every joke, every song, every fart, every story read aloud late into the night, marks a covenant with the people around you; as long as we make noise together in this vastness, we thrive.

**Left** So... Crevasse! *Tom Curran*

**Right** Snow bath! *Zoe Neudorf*



# **An Ode to the Institution Formerly Known as Bislas Sweets**

*Katie Sattler*

*Sept 5th-7th, 2025*

*Various locations around Squamish*

*Participants: Lucas Braun, Jacob Grossbard, Allen Zhao, Elias Bowman, Paul Ramu, Alain Zhiyanov, Alex Levy, Ethan Bonnardeaux, Helena Sverak, Timmy Wong and Katie Sattler.*

**T**his year, G2 was set to be on the Warren Glacier, instructed by Lucas Braun, Jacob Grossbard and Allen Zhao. Warren Glacier is located on the north side of Nch'kay (Mount Garibaldi) on the traditional, ancestral and unceded land of the Skwxwú7mesh and Lil'wat people.

Our plan was to set out from Vancouver on Friday evening, camp at Brohm Ridge and start hiking to the glacier Saturday morning, where we would spend the rest of the weekend. My car group, which included Elias Bowman, Lucas Braun, Paul Ramu and Alain Zhiyanov, rolled into Squamish around 8 p.m. Given that I had started packing for the trip exactly 30 minutes before Elias picked me up, I had neglected to pack a dinner and was pretty hungry at this point. Thus, we elected to pick up a bite to eat from the greatest restaurant in the Squamish Metropolitan Area: Urban Indian Kitchen (which used to be called Bislas Sweets).

After eating a tasty meal (vegetarian special, only \$11.50!) from the sidewalk outside the restaurant in the Save-On-Foods parking lot, we headed up the Brohm Ridge FSR. This proved to be a less-than-straightforward endeavour, involving several instances where all passengers had to vacate the vehicle to move rocks or push the car up some of the road's more gnarly features. Eventually, thanks to Elias' tactful driving, we made it up to the trailhead, where we met up with the rest of the group: Allen Zhao, Alex Levy, Ethan Bonnardeaux, Helena Sverak, Jacob Grossbard and Timmy Wong. We set up



### Top left

Our first of many visits to Urban Indian Kitchen.

*Elias Bowman*

### Top to bottom

1 Setting up a haul system in the bluffs. *Jacob Grossbard.*

2 Samosas on the sidewalk. *Jacob Grossbard*

camp for the night (some of us opting for cowboy camping), excited for the glacier-filled weekend that lay ahead.

Glacier School is famous for having poor weather. Those who have attended G1 in years past may reminisce about setting up tents in howling winds or practicing crevasse rescue in torrential downpour. This particular weekend in September, no storms were in the forecast; Mother Nature had blessed us with something else: smoke. Several wildfires were burning in the Squamish Valley, and overnight, the air quality worsened substantially. In the morning, we discussed whether it would be wise to set out on a rather strenuous hike with so much smoke in the air. After much deliberation and discussion about (chronic) risk, we decided, for the benefit of our lungs, to bail on the glacier. Later on, we calculated that the hike in the smoke would have been equivalent to smoking two cigarettes, although I'm not sure how accurate that is.

We descended the FSR to practice haul systems at the Smoke Bluffs. Despite the lack of glaciers in the Smoke Bluffs, we had a very fun and educational day, with the only casualty being a core shot rope. Big shoutout to Lucas, Jacob and Allen for being such phenomenal instruc-

### Bottom left

Just a bunch of pals hanging out on the Brohm Ridge FSR. *Elias Bowman.*



tors. To treat ourselves, we returned to Urban Indian Kitchen to buy them out of samosas. We passed around dipping sauces while occupying most of the sidewalk outside of the restaurant, sharing laughs and reflecting on the day.

Because we had intended to spend the whole weekend on the glacier and now had a free Sunday, some of us decided to go climbing at Murrin the following day. There wasn't much debate about where to go for dinner after; we headed to Urban Indian Kitchen, arriving just in time before they closed. I can only imagine that the hostess, who had at this point served us three times in three days, was thrilled to see us. While savouring mango lassis from the comfort of the sidewalk, we figured that the only way to honour the restaurant that had been there for us time and time again over the course of the weekend would be an ode:

**An Ode to the Institution Formerly Known as Bislas Sweets**

*Written by Elias Bowman, Paul Ramu, Lucas Braun, Alain Zhiyanov and Katie Sattler*

*To the place we go to close to closing,  
After leaving Bhrom from skies unclear,  
We sit on the sidewalk, never imposing,  
You welcome us with your warm paneer.*

*Climbed and hauled 'till smoke was gone,  
Three times the host, she does the most,  
Rejoice for curry, lassi, and naan,  
The best Indian food on the coast.*

*After pushing through ruts, rocks, and choss,  
We hold a deep craving for tamarind and mint sauce,  
Our spirits lifted higher by every samosa,  
I surely will return the next time I'm in Squamosa.*

**Left** Greatest restaurant ever?? *Elias Bowman*

**Right** Deliberating on how much we care about our lungs. *Elias Bowman*



# Harrison is Only Five Kilometers Away! - Harrison Hut Workhike

*Tejas Vijay and Sunny Das*

*November 9-12, 2025*

*Participants: Alec Digby., John Sherk, Joseph Chiao, Sunny Das, Tejas Vijay, Judith Ko, Tom Koenig, Robin Vinod, Katie Sattler.*

The big objectives for this workhike, as far as I can recollect, included improving trail conditions (trimming some nasty bushes, adding some trail markers, and some navigation through the really heinous cut blocks), and one task at the hut (fixing the outhouse's door hinge). I'd call this more of a hike with some work done along the way, rather than a full-blown workhike. Given the context, we can talk about the actual trip now.

## **Day 1 (November 9)**

The story starts off on a cold, but clear Sunday Morning (November 9) with the trip starting an hour and a half late, in classic VOC fashion, due to a leaky tire on John Sherk's truck. Since the approach to Harrison is quite remote, we decide that it is probably wise to get the leak in the tire patched up by a mechanic. Seeing as it is 7 am on a Sunday, most mechanics are understandably not open, but there is a shop that opens at 8 am in North Vancouver.

After some digging around, Joseph Chiao, the other driver on the trip, informs us that this mechanic seems to be a guy operating out of his garage. After some back and forth, John decides to take the gamble and trust this man, proceeding to message and get an address from him. Fast forwarding a little, and skipping some faffing around, all of us end up in a parking lot in North Vancouver, and the mechanic, a middle-aged man named Jack, pulls up in a red Nissan Altima (I think?) with some soap water, and proceeds to try to find the source of the leak, with everybody huddled around Jack, and generally faffing about. The issue is not diagnosed, and the leak is not found, but Jack was



**Left** Diagnosing John's tire with a cameo from Jack. *Sunny Das*

**Right** Enjoying the hut! *Joseph Chiao's camera, Sunny Das*

very helpful throughout the process, so I do recommend utilizing his services if you ever have to. Apparently he is happy to help 24/7. We decide to proceed and utilize John's portable air pump if the tire happens to deflate.

Now, we finally make our way towards Harrison Hut, driving five hours up the sea-to-sky highway, passing Pemberton, and then up a forest service road until we get to the gates at Harrison, which Joseph has the keys for. A common talking point during the car ride is the fact that, due to the complicated nature of Harrison Hut access, it is quite rare for people to be able to go up there. Most of us would never have got the chance to go there if not for the VOC, so thank you VOC for having a lot of clout in outdoor recreation circles: It does come with its perks. Driving down the FSR is gorgeous, and we make it to the trailhead around 12 pm We eat lunch, get ready, and start hiking at 1pm

The trail is not in the greatest condition, and the tools are brought out. The more keen members of the group that actually want to do work try to create some semblance of a semi-decent trail by trimming bushes, adding trail markers, and doing useful things. The dreaded rain that was forecast starts around 3 pm Things soon become sluggish, with progress slowing to a snail's pace. Sunny Das, John, and I lead the pack, and cross one of the big checkpoints, the emergency campsite.

The original plan was to hike up to the hut in a single push, through the dark, but that is looking unlikely, with everybody drenched and progress being slow. Joseph tells us on the radio that we are almost at the actual campsite, which roughly marks the halfway point. "You're like ten minutes away from camp" he states over the radio. We are, in fact, not ten minutes away from camp. It is at least a few hours away, and the rain is really coming down. We continue trudging along, deciding on the way that it is probably a better idea to set up camp at the site for the night, and continue to the hut in the morning. It is getting dark now. This being the heaviest pack I have carried, along with unforeseen cramps taking control of my legs despite my copious consumption of calories and electrolytes, means that I have to drop my pack on the trail. Joseph offers to carry it to camp for me (thanks for that!).

We reach the campsite around 6 pm, in the dark. Everybody is cold and wet while we set up camp. John creates a makeshift kitchen area under a tarp that is somewhat dry, and gets a fire going using a very sketchy set-up involving his fuel canister. We huddle under the tarp and eat a very wet dinner, though the fire does make it more bearable. After dinner, everybody heads to sleep, hoping to get an early start in the morning.

### **Day 2 (November 10)**

The next morning, I woke up to down feathers scattered all across the tent: There had been a rip in Katie Sattler's sleeping bag overnight (the first of many equipment malfunctions on this trip). She tells me she has been coughing all night, something I was completely oblivious to as the world's deepest sleeper.

It had stopped raining around 4 am, but that's not super helpful as most of the tents are soaked regardless, and a lot of sleeping bags are quite damp. We eat a quick breakfast, and the first group heads out at 9 am John, Katie, and I leave camp last at 9:20 am, and stash the tents and workhike gear under the tarp used to make the kitchen the previous night. My trip notes state that we assumed we would reach the hut by 2 pm We were nowhere near the hut at 2 pm

The first few kilometers of the trail are quite pleasant, and we make good progress, with a few snack breaks here and there. Topics of conversation include multiple choice questions such as "Would you rather have a sailboat or horse?", and various stories of past adventures, VOC related, and otherwise. We pass an old pickup truck a couple minutes into the hike, abandoned and probably brought there when this section of the trail was vehicle accessible (we were walking on an old FSR for a kilometer or so).

As we chug along, it becomes obvious that we will not make it to the hut before 2 pm, so we decide to eat our lunch on the trail. A bit before our lunch break, we see a lone snowshoe that Joseph seems to have forgotten. John graciously offers to carry it up to the hut. This detail will become important shortly.

Slower now, but filled up with lunch, we continue making decent progress until we get to the last kilometer before the hut, and notice there is still 300 metres of elevation to gain. This last kilometer takes a couple of hours, as we're hiking at a snail's pace now. I think I speak for everyone when I say that the last kilometer drove us a little insane. Running on fumes, the only thing getting us up the incline is the thought of the hut, with its sweet, sweet furnace that will allow us to dry our wet clothes. Every few steps, we see massive holes in the snow, created in large part by Joseph's lack of one snowshoe, with some contribution from Tom Koenig as the leader of the pack, breaking the trail for the rest of us.

The last kilometer is deceiving. The trail appears to head towards a

clearing, only to duck into the trees, which is a pain to navigate with all the snow, tree wells, and roots. As the sun sets, and twilight approaches, we finally make it to the hut. Before we head in, people take a quick moment to marvel at the beauty of the location. The VOCers that built the Julian Harrison Hut cooked up a five-star meal when choosing the location.

The rest of the night is spent eating dinner, warming up next to the furnace (well deserved after two days of being wet and cold), and belting our hearts out to classic songs from the VOC Songbook. Shout out to Alec Digby for being a rock star with the guitar. We also reach a common consensus to stay at the hut for 2 nights, leaving early on Wednesday morning to get a head start down the mountain, since the hike up had been so gruelling. We go to sleep very late that night (like 10 pm, but that's basically 1 am mountain time) because nobody wants to miss out on the jam session.

### **Day 3 (November 11)**

Tuesday starts off slow, with clouds covering much of the valley. Tom and John wake up early for a morning jaunt. Everybody else sleeps in. After a relaxed breakfast, we head out for a little exploration session with light packs and a light lunch. We don't see much of a view, on account of the clouds, but being up there is magical regardless. Shenanigans ensue with no set goal, and plenty of time to meander and goof around.

After some meandering and dilly-dallying, we make it up a small hill overlooking a semi-frozen lake. I imagine the view is gorgeous on a clear day, but there wasn't much visibility when we were up there. Our efforts to blow the clouds away are unsuccessful, and we stop for a quick snack.

Joseph talks about a glacier on the other side of the lake. We decide to continue exploring, moving past the lake, encountering some wolverine footprints and poop along the way. After some distance, we conclude that the glacier is an unknown distance away, the visibility isn't good, and it's probably best to conserve energy for the hike down the next day. We head back to the hut in two groups, with one group retracing our steps and the other group taking a more exotic approach back.

After lunch at the hut, the rest of the evening is spent reading old VOC journals. VOCers got up to some crazy stuff back in the day (one trip report states cramming a dozen people into a single 2-person tent), and Roland Burton has some very interesting trip reports. Get your hands on some old journals and go through them for entertainment on a Friday afternoon.

As the sun is close to setting, the sky clears up and we get some gorgeous views. The sky completely clears as night falls and the stars come out. Katie, Alec, and I head inside the hut to warm up and eat dinner. The rest stay outside, which was the better choice in hindsight, as you'll soon see. This next section is written by Sunny, part of the group that stays outside, with a very

special surprise at the end.

### **The Lights Came On (Sunny Das)**

A group of us climbed up onto a rock perched above the snow paths. Harrison Hut stood amidst the trees and against the backdrop of the far-off mountains like a tiny bird's nest with its salmon-peach door, muted colours, and humble frame. It was not separate from the terrain, but part of it, waiting for the night sky to unfold above and whisk it away into the dawn of another day.

Turning 180 degrees, Mt. Zygo towered above us, the first in a stretch of peaks that encircled the valley beneath our feet.

"What is that in the sky?" someone asked, pointing at pink streaks above the hut.

"It must be the sunset colours," someone else replied. Indeed, the light was fading, and it was soon to be dark.

We snapped some photos and stood in awe, looking on at the miles of wilderness that stretched around us.

"You know who the closest people are to us right now?" Joseph asked. "The ones who fly in the planes above us." There were no planes at that moment. That meant that the closest people must be very far indeed, yet we felt, (or at least I did) less alone than in the streets of any bustling city. There is a connection on VOC trips that allows you to strip down to only the essentials - in essence and in spirit. Suddenly, wholesome, childish moments and urges are welcomed and embraced. You can laugh as loud as you wish, you can try to climb a rock and fall, you can use an icicle as a wand. The freedom lies in your hands, cold as they might be. Freedom lies between you and the mountains.

It was already a good night - already a great night even.

And then, the sky moved.

"Are you sure that is a sunset?" someone asked. "It looks like it is green on the bottom."

"Let's pull out a phone" someone suggested. A phone was pulled out, and the focus adjusted on the colours behind Harrison Hut.

They were beautiful. A green that was becoming electric, a pink that was becoming scarlet. That was not the sunset. That was the Northern Lights.

You can imagine how a group of five VOCers already primed to unleash their childlike glee without inhibitions reacted; we went wild.

"Oh my god, look at that! Look at that!" Our heads swivelled around as we looked at the sky around us and above us, a sky that was emerging in greens and reds, stars tentatively blinking through to jewel the shifting clouds. We brought out our cameras, our phones. We snapped photos, we took videos, we gasped, we laughed, we couldn't believe what our eyes told us we were seeing. The Northern Lights at Harrison Hut. The farthest hut, the favourite hut, our first time at the hut, and there we were, standing on a snow-covered



rock, forgetful of the cold, figuring out what it meant to be standing out here in this hour of darkness and light.

Of course, the colours were striking on camera. I caught a picture of Casseiopeia, my favourite constellation, bathed in purple, pink, yellow, orange, and green. Above Zygo, the colours began to shift, with green streaks shooting out like rocket ships. Tilting our heads up, the sky came alive in performance before disappearing behind the curtains to gather its costume and begin the second act. Then the third. Then the fourth.

It was mesmerizing, tantalizing, awe-inspiring - the best of the world's lighting. We wondered if we should get the others back from the hut so they could see it too, but it seemed like a sin to move from our spot on the rock. We shouted out to them, but they did not hear. We gave up, huddling close - for cold was



**Top Group Photo!**  
*Joseph Chiao*

**Middle** Mt. Zygo and the old outhouse.  
*Joseph Chiao*

**Right** Northern Lights  
*Tom Koenig*



still a significant factor even in times of extreme beauty - and laughing again at the sight we'd been gifted to see. For Judith Ko, it was her first Northern Lights ever. For the rest of us, the joy was such that it may have well been. The photos don't do the lights justice. They may be saturated, but they don't capture the raw excitement. They don't capture the freedom to express astonishment, freedom to yell across a mountain valley, freedom to tilt your head up to the open sky. It's a moment I'd like to live in forever.

Tejas: Back to me, and yeah, pretty spectacular sight. Credit where credit is due, they braved the cold and got rewarded for it. Back at the hut, we cook dinner, and share stories of escapades and adventures. We do faintly hear the other group shout out to us, but don't think much of it (lol!). I catch glimpses of the lights from the hut window, but nothing close to what Sunny and the others experienced. Soon afterwards, everybody comes back to the hut, dinner is finished, and more stories are told. Some honourable mentions for best food on the trip go to Robin Vinod making some amazing pancakes, Tom and his infinite supply of pita we cooked over the furnace, Joseph and Sunny with their full-blown gourmet meals of Japanese curry and rice, among others that have slipped my mind.

#### **Day 4 (November 12)**

After dinner, we make a plan for the next morning. We decide to start early, in anticipation of the long day ahead. Since rain is on the forecast for Wednesday afternoon, we want to be as far along the trail as we can when it starts pouring.

Everybody wakes up bright and early the next morning, and we leave the hut at 6:30 am. Going downhill is significantly easier than going uphill, especially the steep, last kilometer, due to lighter packs, and replenished energy reserves (mentally and physically). The snow has firmed up and there is way less sinking and post-holing required. The weather seems to be cooperating so far, and we are blessed with some fabulous views. We dig around the pickup truck we had passed by on the second day as we near the campsite.

The first group reaches the campsite at 10 am, and gathers the tents and tools we had left behind. After a quick snack break, we're off again. The second half of the hike is more difficult, though the trail work on the first day has made it a bit more manageable. The rain starts around noon, and we keep trudging along, anticipating getting into the car, and out of the rain. We reach the trailhead around 2 pm, tired but happy, and drive down the FSR, saying our goodbyes to Harrison Hut for now (goodbyes are only temporary). We stop at Whistler for dinner, and on the drive back, figure out some way to return the FSR gate keys to the government at their office in Squamish. This results in a game of "call a friend, a friend of a friend, a friend of a friend of a friend", and after a lot of phone calls and texting, a volunteer is acquired who can drop the

keys off at the park ranger's office in Squamish the next day. After a short detour in Squamish to give the keys to said volunteer, and we make our way back to Vancouver. Back to civilization after 4 days in the mountains (take me back to Harrison!).

### **Work Report**

As this is technically a workhike, I should probably give a report of the actual work done on the trail. This includes an adequate amount of trail clearing on the first and last day (removing the really annoying bushes and trees), mostly on the first few kilometers of the trail. The trail is still pretty rough, requires navigation of heinous cut blocks, and a lot of bushes whacking your face, with thorns pricking you along the way for good measure. The second half of the trail was in decent enough shape prior to the workhike, and we didn't do much work there.

### **Final Thoughts**

Overall, this was a great trip. Personally, this was my longest venture into the outdoors (4 days compared to only having done one-nighters previously), and by far the most remote (first time I had zero cell service for a whole trip). This trip is definitely the most connected I have ever felt to the land we live on and the nature we are surrounded by. All your worries and problems just melt away when you're hiking through the mountains, listening to the birds, spotting bear prints in the snow, and struggling up a steep incline together, complaining the entire way but enjoying it nonetheless. Nothing else matters, because this is living, the very elixir of life. This was a very spiritual experience for me, and certainly left me feeling refreshed. Certainly my favourite VOC trip so far, with an amazing group of people, and Julian Harrison Hut, and its surrounding area is definitely some of the most beautiful nature I've had the honour of seeing. I can definitely see why people (Joseph) talk so highly about it. The hike to get there is definitely a struggle, but absolutely worth it because the payoff is just that great. Truly a place that takes your breath away.

"To everyone who has never made it out to Harrison - I hope you do. To anyone who sees the Northern Lights on their next venture out there - I am envious of you." - *Sunny Das*

"I may have left Harrison, but my heart never did." - *Tejas Vijay*

## Burns and Turns 10

*Ewan Raven Butterfield*

*February 15th 2025 - February 17th 2025*

*Brian Waddington Hut*

*Participants: Duncan MacIntyre, Kevin McKay-Barona, Zachary Wirth, Shaojie Huang, Shu Yu Fan, Kevin Lam, Polina Spakovsky, Haley Foladare, Tristan Russell, Connor Jakes, Lucas Braun, Joseph Meyer, Declan Taylor, Zoe Neudorf, Simon Holdsworth, Sam Viavant, Julia Jancelewicz, Cassandra Elphinstone, Katie Sattler, Skyler Sauer, Joanne Ho, James Kissane, Eleanor Hsiun, Elias Bowman, Sonia Landwehr, Rachel Tang, Alexander Hudyma Yu, Lydia Dunkin, Mozi Lu, Sasha Soda, Kingson Tam, Ewan Raven Butterfield, Ross Campbell, Kelly Kim, AC Muller, Emi Ikemura, Jacob Grossbard*

**2025** marked the 10th anniversary of Burns and Turns, the VOC's annual Scottish-themed skiing weekend in honour of VOCers Neil Mackenzie and Stephanie Grothe, who had been planning such a weekend for Burns Night before they tragically died in an accident in the mountains. Burns and Turns is a night of singing, dancing, great food, and great company, and I recommend everyone to go. I never had the chance to meet them, but I certainly felt the spirit of friendship and joy that Burns and Turns bring, which I'm told is very much in keeping with who they were.

I had a wonderful time at Burns and Turns despite my determination to make my approach to the Phelix hut unnecessarily difficult. You see, I had recently acquired a new pair of touring skis as well as a new day pack. I had previously only used frame bindings borrowed from the VOC, but had recently invested in a pair of used skis with pins. I was also determined to use my new daypack, so I filled it with gear, then packed it inside my overnight bag, which I then filled around the edges with food and more gear. This had the unfortunate consequence of making it very poorly balanced, which would prove trouble-



**Above left & right**  
Views of & from Phelix  
*Ewan Raven Butterfield*

**Bottom**  
Ross Campbell and  
Shu Yu Fan in their kilts  
*Ewan Raven Butterfield*



some for the forested ascent to Phelix.

After a pleasant drive to the trailhead, we departed towards the hut. The first half of the ascent on the FSR went very smoothly, but once we got into the trees, things got messy. Katie Sattler and I ended up ascending as a pair, and I was grateful for the company. The trail through the trees was icy as anything, and Katie and I kept sliding backwards as we attempted the switchbacks, and only made progress by bracing against trees and sheer determination. To make matters worse, every time I attempted a kick turn, my skis would fall off, and I'd be stuck struggling to put them back on for several minutes. This must have happened at least half a dozen times on the ascent, and I became convinced that I'd been made the fool and someone had sold me faulty bindings. At this point, the sensible thing would have been to take our skis off and boot pack the rest of the trail, which I later discovered many groups had done to much greater success. However, like I mentioned, I was determined to use my new gear, so we kept on.

Eventually, Katie and I made it to the lake and saw the hut, and after a celebratory picture finished our journey. At the hut, I mentioned to Simon Shakibaei that I thought there was an issue with my binding, to which he asked, "Did you lock your toe in?", and promptly leaned down, locked the toe on my pin bindings and told me to try my kick turn again. Lo and behold, it worked just fine. In my

defence, I was not the only semi-experienced VOCer to make that mistake that weekend. I would later find out that Elias Bowman had done the exact thing not a day earlier on his ascent, with his brand-new pin bindings. (Although his pin bindings would actually break later in the season, resulting in him skiing a full run with his boot attached to his ski by way of 3 VOC ski straps.) With the debacle of my ascent behind me, I was free to enjoy all of which Burns and Turns has to offer.

The next day, various groups dispersed to enjoy the wonderful skiing the nearby mountains had to offer. And wonderful it was. Most of the surrounding area had boot to knee deep powder with only a handful of tracks snaking their way down the mountain. As such, my group was able to lap the col between Mt. Frodo and Mt. Peregrine several times, getting fresh turns each time. I had an absolute blast.

This was just the beginning, however, as after returning to the hut I made myself some dinner, but mostly went in on the haggis which Ross Campbell had made. Haggis isn't for everyone, but I implore you to try Ross' hwaggis because, in my opinion, it's fantastic. We then all went outside to boot stomp a dance floor into the lake. Thus began my first ceilidh as Ross led us through various exhausting and dizzying dances until he literally couldn't anymore because his voice was so hoarse. It was a wonderful and fun introduction to ceilidh, although exceedingly tiring to do in ski boots.

From there, the night continued with Ross reciting the ode to haggis, Julia Jancelwicz's fantastic ode to the laddies, and Duncan Macintyre's brilliant ode to the beginner. I highly recommend you find a copy of last year's journal and read Duncan's ode. The remainder of the evening was spent in classic VOC fashion, making our way through the songbook. There is something special about joining together with faces both familiar and unfamiliar to let it all go and enjoy a seemingly universal love of music. Eventually, the singing wound down, and everyone went off to bed.

The next day, I woke up to a beautiful, clear morning. There was a whisky jack enjoying the morning sun, which landed on my skis, so I got my camera out to snap some photos. Tristan Russell, Katie and I went for a quick lap on Cabin Hill before joining with Simon to begin the descent down to the cars. The descent was treacherous with ice and rocks poking through the snow, but after some struggle, we made it down to the bottom, only a few bruises worse for wear.

I'd like to say a big thank you to Ross for organizing this trip. I'll be looking forward to Burns and Turns for years to come.

## How Much Wood Can a Woodchuck Chuck?

*Aaron Lee*

*November 15-16, 2025*

*Stephanie Grothe (Brew) Hut*

*Participants: Cameron Varcoe, Jonathan Schirle, and Aaron Lee*

Faffing on Skwxwú7mesh, St'at'imc, and Lil'wat land. Gratitude to these nations for tolerating us.

**H**ow much wood can a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? Or, more importantly, how much wood can Chuck, the average VOCer, chuck if Chuck would chuck wood up to Brew Hut? These are questions that one concerns oneself with when facing a cord of firewood that eagerly awaits transport up to the said hut. More than three is the answer here.

Firstly, if one pines to chuck pine, or spruce, or fir, or hemlock to Brew, one must ask where to find pine, or spruce, or fir, or hemlock. In times past, the VOC looked to the old cutblock at the trailhead, as legend has it. In modern times, the VOC scoured the Book of Faces for enchanting text on Marketplace. One intrepid VOCer found a spurring passage: “Journey to the North Shore, where you will find glorious piles of split pinewood, free of cost.” Excitement spread through the club, and Schmuck, a young VOCer, agreed to take on this quest (he had previously agreed to chuck firewood up to Brew at the last “changing of the exec” potluck). So, Schmuck set off in his chariot of fire to see what the North Shore had in store.

Schmuck arrived at the location as described in the Book of Faces, to a thoroughly scoured land. Nowhere were these glorious piles of pine as described in the book; all that was left were three scrawny twigs (logs 30 cm in diameter). Determined not to return empty-handed, Schmuck gritted his teeth and heaved the twigs into the chariot. At that moment, a wise old woman ap-

proached Schmuck and, being privy to his plight, pointed west to where more wood could be found. Into the realm of West Van, he went when he ran into Buck. Buck was a tree climber who knew where to find firewood. Buck brought Schmuck to a hidden part of town where heaps of hemlock lay. Buck bucked the hemlock logs, called up his buddy Truck, who trucked the bucked logs up to the summer parking lot, where the firewood lies ready to be split and carried.

Now we know the story behind where we found the wood, but one can't help but ponder: "What is this wood for?" Simply put, both people and huts like to be warm and dry. Without firewood, huts become cold, moist places where mould likes to fester. If mould chews on the hut's frame, the frame gets tired and collapses. People also dislike inhaling mould. As such, chucking wood up to the VOC's huts is generally an annual occurrence.

With firewood unloaded at the summer parking lot, one must organize a wood-chucking party to chuck all the wood to the hut. Initially, this was planned for November 1st & 2nd. Schmuck, being a schmuck, puts together a very vague trip agenda, posting quite last-minute. This doesn't attract much interest, and the trip gets cancelled (there wasn't actually any wood to haul at that time anyway, Buck had yet to buck the logs). Undeterred, he tries again for November 15 to 16. Again, Schmuck being a schmuck puts together a loose trip posting and runs an ad-lib pre-trip meeting, which ultimately only attracts the interest of two other VOCers: Canuck and Willownut.

Saturday (Nov. 15) morning, Schmuck, Canuck, and Willownut planned to leave Vancouver at 06:30 am. Schmuck wakes up at 06:30 am. Despite the later start, the trio set down the Sea to Sky and arrived at the Brew summer parking lot around 9 a.m. with heaps of work cut out for them. Canuck and Willownut start splitting the hemlock rounds into chuckable pieces as Schmuck chucks the pieces over the Roe Creek bridge.

By 12 pm, the crew had hacked and hauled their way through about half a cord. It was time to shift gears and take stock of the firewood situation at Brew. After a quick lunch, with packs loaded with wood and an axe, Schmuck, Canuck, and Willownut rucked up to the hut. Just before the lake, they met enough snow to warrant snowshoes. The four waterlogged logs in Schmucks' pack never felt heavier, and his pace slowed (he found some frozen raisins in the snow, which kept him going). Canuck and Willownut pushed up to the hut with axes in hand, leaving Schmuck in the muck.

As the sun dipped below the mountains, the trio had finished up their work at the hut. All the wood in the woodshed was split and moved into the hut. With a quarter cord of wood left, Brew will probably need more wood to last the winter, but this is a later problem. In the fading sky, it was a light and speedy romp back to the parking lot where the last half-heap of hemlock lay. From 8 pm to 12 am, the three embraced their inner woodchucks and chucked wood in a soaking mist. Each pack load of wood seemed to get heavier as the



night wore on. 12:12 am: all the hemlock is split, stacked, and tarped - it's finally time to go home? All in all, they had moved a big cord (4'x4'x12'ish) a whopping 200 m past the summer parking and over Roe Creek. The stack of split wood was now much harder to steal, and the stage was set for future wood hauling adventures. They didn't see much point as a 3-person crew in hauling one third of a cord each up to Brew that night.

To answer our opening question, the average VOCer can haul as much wood as they set their minds to. But, to haul wood up to Brew within a weekend takes more than 3 crazy woodchucks.



### **Top to bottom & left to right**

- 1** A dizzying amount of firewood *Aaron Lee*
- 2** Sunset woodsplitting *Aaron Lee*
- 3** Nasty knotty frozen logs. Good times. *Aaron Lee*
- 4** Fruit of our first woodsplitting effort *Aaron Lee*



# Good evening, I would like a trail to the Harrison Hut for dinner, please

*Joseph Chiao*

*May 30th 2025 - June 3rd 2025*

*Harrison Hut Trail*

*Participants: Duncan MacIntyre, Alexander Liu, Anabelle Parrella, Roseisa Weeraratne, Aaron Lee, Tristan Lefferts, Cassandra Elphinstone, Shaojie Huang, Noah Wyse, Tom Curran, JJ James, and Gwen Farmer*

The Harrison Hut and the trail accessing it sit on the traditional territory of the Lil'wat Nation. As we work and travel, we humbly acknowledge our presence as visitors to this land, and appreciate the beauty and sustenance it provides.

## Some Context for the Area

Historically, getting to Harrison Hut involved driving down a Forest Service Road (FSR) on the northwest side of Meager Creek, crossing the creek near the Meager Hot Spring, and then following the road up to the trailhead. However, in 2010, Mount Meager experienced one of the largest landslides in Canadian history, which wiped out the access. So, the VOC built a trail in 2013, connecting the remaining trail to the Perkins Main FSR. This FSR branches from the Lillooet River South FSR, creating some distance away from the slide-affected area, eliminating the need to cross Meager Creek altogether.

Circa 2018, logging began in the area. Part of the planned cut block intersected with this newly constructed trail, making it unsafe to travel through while logging was in progress. Fortunately, the logging activities meant that a new FSR was created through the slide-affected areas that connected directly to the old trailhead; so the club started using it as primary access to the hut on an occasional, permit-assisted basis. This situation was less than ideal, but it ensured that at least occasional access for maintenance activities could still take place. In the fall of 2024, this "new" FSR was decommissioned due to the

end of logging operations in the area, which led to the following story...

### **What Happened Last Time**

Harrison Hut is one of my favourite places on Earth. My very first VOC trip was to Harrison Hut, and ever since, I've always wanted to go back. Words cannot describe my love for the area; you would just have to experience it for yourself.

In early November of 2024, we finally received our permit for the fall workhike to Harrison Hut. Unlike previous years, this permit stipulated that the lower FSR was not available for travel, either by foot or by motorized means. That left the old, unmaintained trail as our only option for getting to the hut.

Naturally, we thought this would be a fantastic opportunity to scout out the conditions of this short and seemingly trivial part of the approach. After all, this wasn't my first bushwack, nor did I expect it to be the hardest. From the map, it looked straightforward, just sidehill below the treeline for about 5 km. Historically, this took around two hours to complete at an average pace, so even if we managed half of that, it would still only take us four hours to get to the other side.

Goodness gracious me, was it bad.

In the end, it took me over six hours to make it through, and that was after I left the rest of the group and ran ahead after the halfway point. The last person arrived some 9 hours after starting the hike. Small trees on the route were at the perfect height to smack hikers in the face, and the devil's clubs in the cut blocks implanted my hands with a small family of thorns. The fact that it was dark and raining did not help with the navigation. When I got to the campsite, I dropped my packs and ran back to help carry more stuff for people who were still struggling behind. By the time I finally sat down on my tarp to make dinner, all I had in my mind was the pure hatred that I have towards this trail. I was hungry, but I didn't even care about food. I just wanted a good trail to Harrison Hut.

Anyway, that was last year: thoroughly traumatizing and not at all an experience I want to repeat. So, restoring this trail became a personal vendetta.

### **Some Details on the Trail**

Here's what we gathered from our last outing: the trail wasn't a complete disaster from start to end. Everything from the trailhead leading to the first new cut block was in very good shape, with just a bit of deadfall to be removed. The first new cut block was where the disaster began. It was just a mess of logs, decayed wood, bushes, devil's clubs, and debris scattered over ~150 meters of opening. This distance might not sound like a lot, but it was an absolute nightmare to travel through. After that cut block, we encountered an older cut block where small trees were starting to grow back. Here, the trees were just at the perfect

height where all the branches are right in the hiker's face. This lasted for about a kilometer. You then encountered a second cut block, though this one was much more manageable than the previous one, requiring only some lopper work to expose the original footbed. There's a viewpoint around the 3 km mark of the trail. Then, it entered a third cut block, which spanned about 500 m. This one was by far the worst, with no visible trail and massive logs everywhere obstructing the path of travel. After this section, the trail became visible again; now, the challenge was the amount of large and complex deadfall that was present. Right after this section, 4.8 km in, the trail joined an old FSR.

### **Friday**

Duncan MacIntyre and I anticipated around 15 participants on this trip. However, we seemed to overestimate the number of people who could take five straight days out of their lives to spend building a trail in the middle of nowhere (after all, not all of us are unemployed). In the end, only seven people would stay for the entire duration (Friday to Tuesday). This included me, Duncan MacIntyre, Alexander Liu, Anabelle Parrella, Roseisa Weeraratne, Aaron Lee, and Tristan Lefferts. Noah Wyse was only there for Friday. Tom Curran, JJ James, and Gwen Farmer arrived Saturday morning and left on Sunday afternoon. Cassandra Elphinstone and Shaojie Huang also arrived on Saturday but stayed until the end.

### **The Rockfall**

The area in which the hut is situated is somewhat geologically unstable; the best example of this is the 2010 Mount Meager Landslide. The instability means that there are often rockfalls on the FSR, which I've seen from my two previous visits to the area. In previous years, the rockfalls were usually resolved easily by having someone run ahead of the car to remove potentially damaging boulders from the path. However, the boulder we encountered on this outing was so significant that we thought dynamite and bulldozers would be required to clear the path.

Luckily, the VOC specializes in unconventional solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems. For the moderately sized boulders, we used the peavy (a long metal rod) and our quads to shift them out of the way. For the ones that were too large to move, even with the help of a mechanical advantage, we were able to tow them away with the truck. For the one particularly uncooperative boulder, Noah Wyse and I resorted to dropping smaller rocks on it until it broke into smaller pieces. After a good 45 minutes of hard work, the road was finally wide enough for our cars to pass. Great success.

### **FSR Clearing**

One of the primary objectives of Friday was clearing the FSR between the 28

km turnoff from the Perkins Main FSR to the trailhead. This job was performed by a team of people lopping, with me operating the bush saw up ahead. Operating the bush saw was an incredibly powerful experience, as it basically just deletes whatever plants get in your path. It made me feel like an evil capitalist mowing down the forest. But of course, what we were trying to achieve was quite the opposite. After a hard-working afternoon, we cleared the road all the way up to the trailhead.

### **Trailhead Camp Setup**

As we cleared the trail, the rain started to come down; by the time we cleared our way to the camp, it really started to pour. Duncan had brought a massive tarp, so we promptly set up a shelter and all the amenities. Considering that a good amount of person-days would be spent at this place, Duncan and Aaron set out to dig a couple of holes for people to poop in. Alex and Anabelle volunteered to prepare dinner for our first night. They cooked up a pot of curry with rice, which was delicious, even by frontcountry standards. Noah left the campsite before dusk to comply with our permit, unfortunately missing out on the great meal.

After dinner, Duncan and I waited for a window of clear weather to scout ahead. We ran all the way to the first cut block with my drone. After some aerial surveillance, we went into the cut block and tried to determine the path of least resistance. It was here that I slipped and instinctively grabbed a devil's club for balance; as a result, a group of thorns delightfully implanted themselves in my right thumb. After a few circles around the cut block, we headed back as the sky started to darken.

Back at camp, the rain started to pour again as night fell. I spent some time sitting in the car with my laptop, analyzing the drone photos I just took. Aerial footage is often helpful with navigation in the backcountry. I've utilized this many times to help with route finding. However, in an environment like that of a cut block, the features were too dense and complex for the drone to be effective. I was still able to familiarize myself with the area by looking at those photos. Ultimately, they were not as helpful as I'd hoped.

After staring at my screen for a solid hour, Duncan joined me in the car to talk about our plan for the next day. After a comprehensive discussion about team distribution, landslide risks, and other logistical hurdles, we finally went to sleep at half-past midnight.

### **Saturday**

Matt Gunn, a past VOCer who wrote the Southwest BC scrambling bible, expressed interest in filming our efforts for an upcoming documentary of his. We thought that this would be a fantastic opportunity to showcase the good work that the VOC does for the outdoor community, so we invited his producer,

Alexi, on our trip to film our activities. Alexi followed various groups throughout the weekend, documenting their actions with his fancy camera and drone. He came up alongside Tom, Cassandra, JJ, Gwen, and Shaojie.

We decided to split into three crews: a scouting crew, a chainsaw crew, and a general-purpose crew. The scouting crew, led by Duncan, would charge ahead to find the best route and put up trail markers as they travelled. The chainsaw group consisted of Cassandra, Tom, and me. The last group, led by Aaron, had most of the tools and slowly worked their way down the trail to clear everything that wasn't cleared by the two previous teams. After breakfast, each team headed into the forest to start their day of work.

Cassandra learned to chainsaw from Jeff Mottershead on this very trail some 10+ years prior, and now she was becoming the teacher, with me as the student. I observed as she and Tom explained the intricacy of removing downed trees, which was a far more involved and difficult task than it seemed. To effectively employ the chainsaw, one must first consider all the forces acting on the log. In a simple case, a deadfall is compressed on one side and strained on the other, so it's important to sequence the cut in such a way that the wood splits away from the blade instead of pinching into it. The next thing to consider is the way in which everything will move after the cut is made. You wouldn't want the log to fall onto the blade, and you definitely don't want it to fall onto you or your friends. Only after considering all these different factors should the chainsaw be started.

### **Starting the Chainsaw & Tom's Mechanical Engineering Seminar**

Hello, you have just been bamboozled. The chainsaw won't start.

Or rather, we were bamboozled, because the chainsaw just wouldn't start, no matter how hard we pulled on the starter cord. We tried for a long time, thinking that it was simply because the chainsaw had been dormant for a while. I don't remember how long it went on, but pulling on that cord was definitely the most physically strenuous part of the day. It was wet, my arm and back were starting to hurt, and we were definitely having less fun as the minutes went by. At some point, we realized that brute force just wasn't going to cut it, so we started to investigate.

Tom repeatedly emphasized to us as we pulled the cord: "To run an internal combustion engine, you need three things: Fuel, compression, and ignition." We could smell the fuel being injected into the engine at full choke, so we knew that wasn't the issue. We could feel the resistance when pulling the cord, so we knew we were compressing the cylinder. That left ignition, which was done by the sparkplug, so we decided to open up the engine and check what was going on inside. It turned out that a tiny bit of debris had somehow made its way into the gap in the sparkplug, redirecting the current and neutralizing the spark. We removed said debris with my trusty army knife, and upon reinstalling the engine back together, the chainsaw quickly sputtered into life. Great success!

After a few demonstrations from Cassandra, I took over the chainsaw

## VOCJ68

to practice my skills. Holding the chainsaw for the first time was an interesting experience. I placed the saw where I intended to make the cut, and it started melting through without much effort. Removing my first deadfall felt incredibly accomplished. I watched as what was once blocking the trail now tumbled down the hill out of our sight. A sense of satisfaction followed. At that moment, I really considered dropping out of school to do this for a living. But there wasn't any time for daydreaming, the trail was still long, and there was still lots to be done. I continued chainsawing for the rest of the morning, improving my skills and gaining good experience with the help of two incredible mentors.

### **The Cut Block**

Upon arriving at the cut block, a route had already been marked by Duncan's crew, and it had already received some improvements from Aaron's group. The weather also started to clear, which gave everyone a much-needed break. The real challenge came at the end of the cut block. A whole bundle of very large logs piled on top of each other, with no sign of solid ground underneath. After several passes by the chainsaw crew, we decided that the correct solution should be to reroute the trail lower. This route makes more sense on a topography map, as it essentially straightlines the latter third of the cut block, and it was my recommended line from analysis of the drone photos. This route would mean fewer complex and unpredictable chainsaw jobs, but it also meant that some of the efforts from the other crews would go to waste. We ultimately chose this strategy, knowing that we would have to abandon the good work done by others earlier in the day. After some more shovelling, lopping, and sawing, we managed to make this new route work beautifully. By the time we finished working on the cut block, people started to get tired and hungry. Some

### **Photo Me Chainsawing *Alexi L***



decided to head back to camp and prepare dinner, while the rest carried the chainsaw and its associated tools further down the trail in preparation for the next day.

### **Dinner & Campfire**

For dinner that day, we had bbq. While preparing the food for this trip, I had stupidly forgotten that making burgers required burger buns. We ended up making do with Wonder Bread, which really wasn't the worst. These burgers ended up being some of the best I'd ever tasted in my life. As the sky began to dim, I started a campfire, and people sat around the fire with high spirits from the scrumptious dinner. Without any prior communication, Alex had decided to bring marshmallows, and I had brought butter cookies with chocolate. S'mores were quickly produced, and our lives became so much sweeter.

As the darkness fell and the stars emerged, people became sleepy from their hard day of work and began to turn in. Having committed to cleaning up before going to bed, I stayed up a little longer to tidy up our camp. As I finished stashing all the food back into the car, I noticed the aurora. The mountains around set the stage as the light beams began their dance across the sky. It started subtly, but grew into an impressive spectacle. I was hesitant to head to sleep as I did not want to miss out on something so unique and beautiful. It was almost 1 am by the time I reluctantly went to the tent for some much-needed rest.

### **Sunday**

Waking up at 6 AM, I felt energetic. The same could not be said about other people around me, so I quietly got up and out of the tent to prepare breakfast. The weather was beautiful, and it was just the type of morning that I love to have in the backcountry. For breakfast on this day, I had prepared pancakes, scrambled eggs, and bacon. I had planned to spoil the crew on this day, knowing that food quality would drop as we migrated towards the campsite at the end of the trail. No one else woke up for a while, so I got to take in the quietness as I churned out the pancakes one by one. Around an hour after I started cooking, people began appearing from the tents. The breakfast was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, fueling people up for another day of challenges ahead.

Our plan for the day was to move to the second campsite, located at the far end of the old Harrison Hut Trail. Duncan and Tristan would stay behind to shuttle the weekend crew out while the rest of us worked our way towards the other end.

### **The Stroll**

Shaojie and I took on much of the group's food for our two nights at the second campsite, so our packs were fairly hefty. Adding on the chainsaw and associat-

ed equipment, we were now carrying a soul-crushing amount of weight. So, we decided to book it to the other end, shortening our suffering. Meanwhile, the others walked slowly as they loped their way along the trail. We ran ahead of everyone, only stopping to chainsaw the occasional log.

At one point, we encountered an area that needed more work, so we left the chainsaw behind and continued to camp. We planned to return and complete those sections once we disposed of our payload. On the way to camp, we discovered that the third new cut block, which we previously thought was an absolute nightmare, was actually much nicer than we remembered. We deduced that the combination of darkness and overgrowth in the fall contributed to the difficult navigation. If a hiker is off the footbed, even by just a meter, the terrain becomes infinitely more difficult to travel through. Having discovered this pleasant surprise, we carried on to our destination without much difficulty. Upon arrival, we took some well-deserved breaks before heading out again. Cassandra took a bath in a stream nearby, cooling off on an otherwise scorching day.

People were already exhausted by the time they arrived at camp, as the trail was still not an easy one to get through. Most opted to stay and rest at the new camp, setting up and cooking dinner. Seeing how precious the chainsaw runtime was, I decided to head back out with Aaron and Cassandra to chainsaw as much as we could until sundown, before we returned for dinner. We brought a can of Spam and some treats with us; then off we went back onto the trail.

### **Going Back With More Chainsaw Work**

With Tom leaving in the afternoon, we recruited Aaron to join the chainsaw group. Much like me a day prior, he also had no previous experience with the chainsaw. Having done a solid day and a half of chainsaw work, I became Aaron's teacher as he began to learn. He quickly became familiar with the operation and started contributing ideas and opinions. As we worked through the evening, our bodies began to protest. The hot day had depleted us of sodium, and the long work hours with minimal rest burnt up many calories. We decided that the obvious solution to both problems would be the can of Spam that I had brought with me. So, there we were, half past 7, having not eaten anything since lunch; the three of us opened the can of Spam and ate it as if it were our last meal on Earth. The unnatural-tasting cured meat actually energized us, and we continued to work for an hour and a half before heading back for some real food.

### **Monday**

As we woke up in the morning, strains from our many days on the trail began to show. Mainly, the thorns that many of us fell victim to started to develop

infections, but also many other wounds the trail left us with. A small “field operating room” was set up, and we began plucking the nasty little bastards out of each other’s hands and body and patching up the various cuts. This was a sweet moment during the trip, where the gentleness of people as they cared for each other really contrasted with their fierce work on the trail.

For our last full day of work on the trail, we decided that it would be best to split into three crews again. After arriving in the late morning, Duncan went past our camp with Shaojie, Tristan, and Anabelle to clear out a small cut block at the very beginning of our existing trail. Alex stayed around camp to make lunch, lop, and protect our food from bears. Aaron, Cassandra and I would head back out to continue with our chainsaw work, and Roseisa joined us to lop.

We let Aaron start operating the chainsaw that day, hoping to make him a competent operator by the end of the trip. The morning and early afternoon went by without much complication. Some jobs were harder than others, but overall, there wasn’t anything that we were unable to tackle. Alex came by



### **Top to bottom**

**1** People walking through the new trail through the cut block  
*Tom Curran*

**2** Saturday night  
*Duncan MacIntyre*

**3** Trail cleared of downed trees  
*Aaron Lee*

### **Left**

The trailbed team working through the cut block  
*Alexi L*

at some point with our lunches, and we were all thoroughly impressed by the backcountry DoorDash service that we were provided with. It was a chill day full of chainsawing, good food, and interesting conversations.

### **The Nap**

Around 4 PM, we encountered a particularly difficult challenge. Two massive trees had fallen with their root balls still intact on and above the trail. Cutting these trees risked destabilizing the ground beneath the trail, and there weren't many good positions to cut from. At this point, we were all incredibly tired, having worked for many hours without rest. I decided to just ignore the tree, take a nap right there on the trail, and figure it out when I woke up.

Having seen me lie down with the chainsaw, Aaron and Cassandra also joined in on the group nap. This was possibly the best decision I made on the entire trip. We woke up an hour later feeling energized, confident, and ready to work on our next challenge.

We were able to figure out a plan for the two downed trees, and it worked beautifully. I specifically remember these two trees from our last visit; having to hop over them several times with massive backpacks was an absolute nightmare. It's almost as if I have defeated a past opponent who used to haunt me on this trail, which made me feel so incredibly accomplished upon clearing them. I walked back and forth through the previously blocked section, proud to have resolved this blockage.

After just two other fairly easy cuts, the chainsaw team completed the task of removing every single deadfall from the trail. We initially thought the chainsaw might not even get past the first cut block, and now we had completely shattered the expectation. With a little bit of fuel left and some sunlight remaining, I decided to cut two slices off the massive log that used to haunt me and bring them back to the club as souvenirs.

That night, everyone sat around the fire, happy with the work that we had accomplished. There was a lot of suffering, pain, and demoralizing events that happened throughout the trip, but none of that seemed to matter anymore. We had accomplished more than we had set out to do, and done it beautifully. That night, a few of us decided to ditch the tent and sleep under the stars. The night was especially peaceful; stars in the sky, no wind, and no worries left.

### **Tuesday**

I once again woke up at an unreasonably early time. Maybe my body just likes to savour more awake time in the mountains. I decided to take some time for myself and walked down the FSR to an opening. There I sat and immersed myself among the mountains. The peak was colossal yet detailed, and static yet lively. The river down the valley was so vibrant yet calming, and violent yet gentle. I can go on and on about everything that was going on around me, but

the beauty of the land cannot be justifiably conveyed in this piece of writing, which is why I encourage everyone reading this to visit Harrison Hut now that the access is restored. I find experiences like this to be the purest form of joy, without any distractions or complications. This is the reason I travel into the mountains and volunteer so much time and effort into improving access. I want more people to feel this indescribable feeling and treasure this connection with the land. Right there in that moment, there was nothing else. It was just me and the mountains.

I unfortunately had to exit my own world as I wanted to finish cooking breakfast before others woke up. The group discussed our plan over breakfast, which was that we would make it to the cars as quickly as we could reasonably manage while finishing up the last bits of essential trailwork. I was the last to leave the campsite, carrying the pieces of wood that we cut the day prior. The two rounds were not easy to take. Aaron and I alternated holding them on our way back; it made for some interesting contraptions as we tried to rig them onto backpacks. I ended up strapping one to my backpack while carrying the other. The two pieces of wood made my pack properly heavy, which gave me more time to take in the surroundings as I slowly made my way back to civilization.

Upon arriving at the cars, everyone was stoked. We loaded up the cars and said goodbye to this magical place that we were about to leave behind. After a good meal in Pemberton, the nine of us said goodbye to each other, for the time being, as we headed back to Vancouver and our ordinary lives.

### **Final Few Words**

This trip taught me a lot. I learned some valuable chainsawing and trail-building skills, which I have already started using and passing on to others, and will continue to do so for the rest of my life. I learned how to work with people, how to trust them, and how everyone can achieve so much when you believe in them and help them when they struggle. I also learned a lot about myself. I realized that work like this made me recognize my self-worth like nothing else. Ultimately, we didn't summit any peaks, break any records, or even really get anywhere. All we did was help more people access a hut in the middle of nowhere. But this experience with the mountains is so beautiful, so valuable, and so essential to me that I believe that simply having someone be there, they become a better person. That is worth the world to me.

So, go out there, enjoy Harrison Hut now that it is once again accessible. I hope you find your journey as enlightening as my own!

## Rumour Has It There are Mermaids in the VOC

*Elizabeth Chu*

*Various Occasions in the Year of 2025*

*Water*

*Participants: Elizabeth Chu, Rhiannon Henley, Peach Trippell, Leon Delansay, Raven Butterfield*

**O**n one of the last days of the 24/25 school year, I was playing around in the ocean near Locarno Beach with some other VOCers during the sunset. It was gratifying to float around with friends while feeling the currents pass by. There was true whimsy in debriefing the semester and sharing big summer plans as the reflection of the sky on the water beamed golden. The only thing that could have made this moment more magical was the presence of a mermaid tail. I'm sure that, thinking out loud, I asked the people around me what the color of their tail would be.

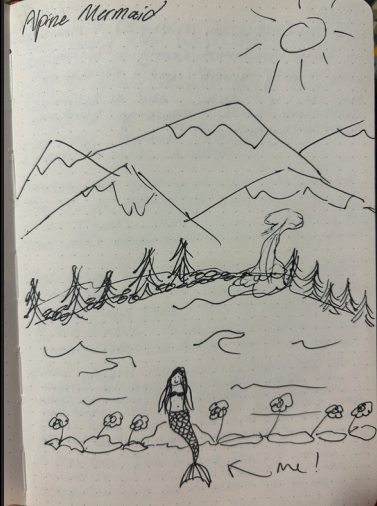
After leaving Vancouver a few days later, I was on a mission to swim in as many bodies of water as possible. I quickly gained a reputation among friends I met in Copenhagen for being mermaid-like due to my stoke to swim. I'm satisfied with the variety of places I was able to swim at this summer, but my imagination only went so far in terms of being a mermaid. I could play mermaids with my friends for as long as they were willing to put up with the cold water, but my imagination was limited by the absence of the physical feeling of having a tail in the water.

In August, I went to Brian Waddington Hut to help build the walls. On the drive up, I admired the teal, glacier-fed lakes as they sparkled in the sun. I longed to swim in them. For the nine days I was at the hut, I stared out at the lake, and swam in it as many times as possible (ignoring the poop warnings, but making sure to rinse off in the river afterwards).

When I returned to Vancouver, I had a very similar sunset swim expe-



**Above** Majestic merpeople at Granite Falls.  
*Megan Schenk*



### Top to bottom

- 1 Sketching in my journal while on a visit to the Roland Burton Hut in August. *Elizabeth Chu*
- 2 Testing the chilly waters on the Cheakamus before our day full of paddling *Rhiannon Henley*
- 3 Pure stoke painted on my face from being an alpine mermaid *Anya Jones*

rience with some new friends and some of the same friends who were there in April. I expressed my wishes to be a real mermaid again, but this time with a new dream of being an alpine mermaid. I dubbed 'alpine mermaid' as a term for a mermaid who calls an alpine lake home. The friends who had heard the same mermaid dreams from me at the beginning of summer encouraged me to chase my dreams.

Something great must have been in the water that night, or maybe it was a full moon, who knows, but the next time I went for a swim, something magical happened. Just like in the hit 2000s show 'H<sub>2</sub>O: Just Add Water', I gained a real mermaid tail and swam around with the seals at Wreck Beach! Obviously I was stoked to try this newfound power in as many bodies



## VOCJ68

of water as I could. Rumour has it there are mermaids on the Cheakamus... On the Intro to White Water trip the next weekend, I mermaided around in the warm waters of Levette Lake and took a brief dip in the beautifully chilly waters of the Cheakamus river. On this trip, I learned that Rhiannon Henley is also a mermaid, and we conspired to mermaid together in the ocean on a future sea kayak trip.

I had a joyous time swimming around at sea level with my tail, but my dreams to be an alpine mermaid persisted. I knew my weather window was nearing its end, so with a school-free day to spare on Truth and Reconciliation Day, I rallied a crew to head up to Garibaldi Lake. Rumour has it there are mermaids in Garibaldi... The weather was a bit unfavourable for someone who has a hard time warming up, but eventually the sun presented itself and I got to be an alpine mermaid in the Gatorade-blue water of my favorite glacial lake. Dream come true! I very quickly got a brain freeze after submerging my head for a bit, but it was so worth it!

Rumour has it there are mermaids at Granite Falls. On the weekend after paddling up through Say Nuth Khaw Yum Provincial Park to the Granite Falls campground, Rhiannon and I mermaided together and learned a few more VOCers are mermaids. Leon Delansay, Peach Trippel, Raven Butterfield, Rhiannon, and I swam around the kayakers as they practiced rescues. As the sun dipped behind the mountains, the sky became blanketed in spectacular sunbeams, creating a truly magical moment.

The magical, fulfilling feeling that comes after a mermaid sesh may scientifically come from the endorphins released by a cold plunge, but I choose to believe that letting myself live out my childhood (and now college student) dreams and explore my wonders to their full potential is what brings that feeling. Maybe it's a mix of both. Either way, I'm excited to do more mermaid adventures in cool places with my new mermaid friends, and maybe even meet some more mermaids.

I felt that I needed to write a whimsy, happy, 'type 1' fun trip report after my most recent trip reports have been quite consequential. I also hope this story inspires you to follow through with your wildest dreams. Anything is possible, you just have to make the right connections, put in the work, and remain resilient to get there.

# Among the Bones of the Thule

*Lucas Braun*

The alarm rings at 7:15 am, signalling the wake-up call for breakfast. We want to be on the sea ice by 9:00 am in order to catch low tide; navigating the intertidal zone any later necessitates traversing floating ice blocks and treacherous cracks. We make good time and are past the intertidal zone by 9:05 am. Our journey across the sea ice takes us meandering through cloudy blue puddles, around seal holes, and over gaping cracks peering into oblivion. This world belongs to the polar bears. Our recent encounters with a mum and two cubs keep them fresh in our minds, and a shotgun hangs from my shoulders as a precaution. Dr. Greg Henry, our supervisor, leads us around a cape and into a chilling headwind. Skraeling Island looms ahead of us, a pyramid of black granite cliffs and sparse patches of green.

I'm wearing a T-shirt, and quickly put on a shell once goose bumps envelop the flesh of my arms. Five of us scatter across the ice, walking for seemingly endless stretches without Skraeling getting any bigger. As we near its rocky shores, cracks shoot across the ice, portals into the black waters below the surface. We gingerly navigate a labyrinth of ice blocks and cracks until we are safely on land. There, we see what it is we came for. A walrus skull sits on a manmade bench of stone, south of three large pits—the remains of Thule houses.

**Photos** *Lucas Braun*



## VOCJ68

As the ancestors of today's Inuit, the Thule began a long migration from Western Alaska a thousand years ago. Within a few generations, they had spread across the Arctic. The Thule were not the first here. Before them came the Dorset, who also lived on Skraeling. They contended with the harsh Arctic environment using simple boats, spears, and little else, relying on the sea ice to hunt. Seals were their main source of food, but most everything else we know about them is lost. By the time the Thule arrived in the Eastern Arctic, the Dorset were gone.

The Thule left a much larger archaeological impact than the Dorset. Dog sleds, bows, arrows, drills, kayaks, umiaks, and pit houses marked their presence—bones across the tundra to be seen centuries later. Their advanced watercraft (kayaks and umiaks) were the key to their life in the cold North, for they gave them the ability to hunt whales. A single bowhead could provide enough food and fuel to sustain 70 people a year. As the Medieval Warm Period opened up the Arctic Ocean to these creatures, it also opened up tremendous opportunities. With the gifts of the whales, the Thule spread across the entire Canadian Arctic, making it to Greenland and even trading with the Norse, as chainmail found on Skraeling indicates. Yet even with bowheads, the Arctic was a place of austerity. To be chosen as a harpoonist was to have the trust and faith of your community at your back, knowing that starvation and death would occur should you fail.

I stand among the pit houses, recently excavated by archaeologists. The vertebrae of some massive creature litter the ground. In one of the pits, a bowhead skull stares back at me. Greg walks around the low meadow, pointing out each pit. They're roughly circular, with a main area and a small cooking area off to the side. The walls are made of massive chunks of stone, while the floors have flat flagstones. The entrance to each home is a small crawl space, which allows the buildings to retain precious heat. It would certainly have been no small feat to lift these rocks into place. A pile of rocks nearby is revealed to be a fox trap by Greg. Apparently, foxes would enter a precariously balanced stone structure for the promise of food and knock over a keystone, causing the pile to collapse on them. The Thule also made these traps for polar bears. You can imagine the size of those rocks. A small, unassuming rocky beach next to the site houses the Norwegian explorer Otto Sverdrup's lunch spot from when he came through in 1899.

Like a fox in one of those stone traps, I am crushed by the immensity of the history of this place. Where I stand, villages stood. Babies were born in those rocky pits. Children laughed and cried and played among the rocks and snow. Men came of age. Women came of age. They fell in love, started families. Then they grew old and died. Whales sat on that beach, their life-giving blood flowing on the rocks and ice. Feeding a whole community, culture, and way of life. Then one day the whales didn't sit there anymore.

A changing climate in the form of the Little Ice Age locked the bow-heads out of the North. The sea ice no longer thawed in the summer enough to permit them passage. So the Thule packed up and left. By the time Sverdrup arrived, they had been gone for several centuries. All that remained of the entire community on Skraeling were piles of stones and bones.

It's a funny story that bones tell. They remain silent, a two-dimensional abstraction of the life they once held. If you picked up a human skull, could you hear from its mouth all the times it laughed, screamed, cried, flirted, boasted, and cursed? You can imagine such things, but ultimately, silence answers, leaving imagination your only guide.

...

I wrote these words in the summer of 2023, when I was privileged enough to work at Alexandra Fiord, a small inlet on the east coast of Ellesmere Island, where Skraeling Island is situated. I was a research assistant to Dr. Greg Henry during his last year at the site, capping off 44 years of studying plant community responses to experimental warming. We left our own bones in the Fiord, and they're not ones I'm necessarily proud of.

For three months, we lived and worked in a decommissioned RCMP outpost, at one point the northernmost police outpost in the world. The buildings were about 70 years old, and they originated from a dark period in Canadian history. They were built as part of the Canadian Government's Cold War initiative to establish sovereignty over the Arctic. As part of this initiative, hundreds of Inuit families were forcefully and deceitfully relocated far from their homes into regions of the Arctic that were previously uninhabited. Many of the communities that arose from this policy have since thrived, a testament to the resilience of the Inuit. Yet the hardship that immediately accompanied relocation was significant. Alexandra "Alex" Fiord was slated to be one of these communities. While this never came to fruition, the police outpost remained—bones of Canada's sordid mistreatment of Indigenous peoples.

After the RCMP abandoned the outpost, it wasn't long before researchers moved in, taking advantage of the available infrastructure and the unique ecosystem that the lowland of Alexandra Fiord offered. Much of the research done on warming at Alex went on to inform our understanding of climate change in the Arctic. But it came at a cost, as I would learn over the summer.

First of all, the fossil fuel consumption required to get to the site was astronomical. We boarded three different flights, hopping ever northward as weather permitted. One even had to turn around mid-flight due to the weather, resulting in a flight that ended where it began in Iqaluit. Each runway I saw was lined with barrels of jet fuel and diesel: solar energy captured and locked away millions of years ago, and re-released in every stove that warms a house,

or every plane that connects them. Fossil fuels make life in the Arctic possible. They warm it up, on scales both intimate and incomprehensible.

Second, each mark we left on the tundra was nearly permanent. There's a suspended quality to life in the north, which is a byproduct of two physical properties that give us our innate biological sense of time. The first is 24-hour daylight. The second is that photosynthesis, the process by which air and water are miraculously alchemized into solid biomass, occurs at glacial rates in the Arctic. These two processes make everything slow. Plants grow and heal so slowly that their ability to transform a landscape is almost imperceptible. The golden hour of sunset can last weeks, made so much more vibrant by the orange and yellow of senescing willow leaves across the tundra. Greg pointed out many relics of his 44 years up there, including a set of ATV tracks from decades ago that had not disappeared since. A footprint left in the tundra from thirty years ago can still be seen today. The outline of a research plot will likely remain visible for decades. You cannot be up there and ignore how you transform the landscape.

Third, urban life has done an excellent job of hiding the impact of our waste from us. But in the North, you have three options for waste disposal: burn it, ship it somewhere else, or throw it in the ocean. Seeing the black plumes of smoke from burning plastic or watching the metal cans from your meal enter water, where they will hopefully corrode (or be buried by sediment), impresses on you just how much we are suffocating our world.

The austerity of the Arctic teaches reciprocity like nothing else. The gifts it gives you are beautiful. But you cannot hide from how extractive you are up there; you cannot hide the scars of what you take. Bones from our time up there may tell a story to others who come to Alexandra Fiord. But will they see the joy in those bones? Will they see all the times we laughed, all the times we learned something new, all the times we made cherished memories? Or will they see a trail of destruction? Our research up there may have been valuable, but it left me with the feeling that by trying to love and protect this place, we were slowly killing it.

Climate change is impacting the Arctic much faster than anywhere else. Once reliable sea ice is dwindling, making hunting for Northern communities an increased challenge. Plant communities are shifting, with southern plants expanding ever northward, and certain species dominating competitively over others. Glaciers are receding at rates that evoke nihilistic despair.

On Skraeling Island lie the bones of a community that died because of climate change. A way of life that was once possible due to the presence of bowheads became unsustainable once the ice locked the whales out. Yet change begets change. The Thule may be gone, but their descendants, the Inuit, remain. They adapted to a new way of life, moved south to follow opportunity, and forged a vibrant and resilient culture. Because that is what you do in a changing

environment that demands total obsequence. You adapt, move, or perish.

This time we live in is terrifying, and solutions to the existential threats we face seem ineffectual and lack prioritization. I don't know how we will persist as those northerners did during the Little Ice Age, and I can't even say with certainty that we can. But I can say this: 700 years later, pink saxifrage flowers fill the Thule pit houses, and the walls of Alexandra Fiord ring with laughter once more.

**Photos** *Lucas Braun*



## What is the VOC?

*Kathleen Griffin*

Remember skiing Garibaldi with Anton one day,  
We got stranded at Sphinx when the lake melted away.

Remember on New Years Eve, running into the night,  
Sarah & I in the nude.. we both got frostbite.

Remember carrying loads up to Phelix so many times,  
John's always there, with a pack heavier than mine.

Remember peakbagging all night, Seattle's hills in our view,  
In twenty-four hours, we bagged thirty-two.

Remember Metal Dome sharks on the season's first tour,  
Zenon went shirtless, what a sight to endure.

Remember Sean on cross country skis at Red Heather,  
Breaks one in half doing jumps like a shredder.

Remember driving to Whistler to watch the northern lights,  
Cowboy camping with Laura, in awe of the sights.

Remember skiing Cloudburst on my August birthday,  
A continued Kiwi tradition, the Canadian way.

My friends joined with Hawaiian shirts & champagne,  
Using waterfalls & lakes to cool off again.

Remembering so fondly, my two years in B.C  
All the adventures with friends - that's the VOC.



**Photo** He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata he tangata.  
What is the most important thing? The people, the people, the people.  
- Māori proverb

# **2025-2026 PHOTO CONTEST**







**Left**

Ivan Fediaev

Last of the Larches

Camera: *Landscape*

Winner

**Below**

Alexandre St-Aubin

Three

Camera: *Landscape*

Runner-up





**Above**

Aidan Mastroianni  
Golden Hour

*Phone: Landscape  
Winner*

**Right**

Duncan MacIntyre  
Sunlight and Mist on  
Maquin

*Phone: Landscape  
Runner-up*







**Above**

Faisal Maqbool  
The Bloom!

*Phone: Flora & Fauna  
Winner*

**Right**

Paul Ramu  
Bloom on the edge  
*Phone: Flora & Fauna  
Runner-up*

**Top left**

Tobias Jäggi  
Rare Piebald Raven spotted  
on Sentinel Pass  
*Camera: Flora and Fauna  
Winner*

**Bottom left**

Luis Dias  
A common marmoset that  
was very curious about me  
and my camera, during a  
trip to the atlantic forests of  
southern Brazil.  
*Camera: Flora and Fauna  
Runner-up*





**Above** Stefanija Rekasius  
Ice Ice Ice  
*Phone: In Motion Winner*

**Below** Julia Jancelewicz  
Crossing from the shadow into the  
light, walking on the skies.  
*Phone: In Motion Runner-up*



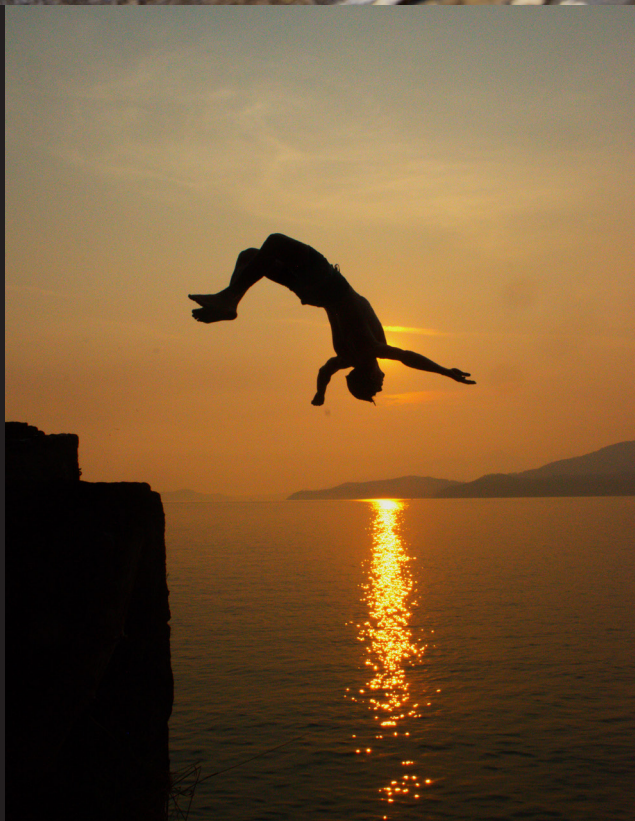


**Above**

Liam Von Fisher  
Window in The Alpine  
*Camera: In Motion*  
Winner

**Right**

Tristan Lefferts  
Touch the Sun  
*Phone: In Motion*  
Runner-up





**Left**

Alex Levy  
Ivan being the first to  
brave the torrent  
Camera: People  
Winner

**Below**

Imogen Hayes  
#bringbackdabbing  
Camera: People  
Runner-up





**Above**

Aaron Lee  
Find someone who looks  
at you like John looks at  
this impact driver  
*Phone: People Winner*



**Left**

Elizabeth Chu  
Portrait from under  
the sea  
*Phone: People  
Runner-up*



**Above** Paul Ramu  
Bubble propelled sunset sends  
*Phone: Outside The Frame  
Winner*

**Right** Emi Ikemura  
River [Beauty] Acidification  
*Phone: Outside The Frame  
Runner-up*

**Top right** Isaac Borrego  
Meandering meltwater in the  
mountains  
*Camera: Outside The Frame  
Winner*

**Bottom right**  
Alexandre St-Aubin  
From Above  
*Camera: Outside The Frame  
Runner-up*







**Above** Julia Jancelewicz  
Alpine Spa. Turns out glacial  
silt makes for a great face  
mask.

*Phone: Candid  
Winner*

**Left**

Elizabeth Chu  
Sheeeeeesh

*Phone: Candid  
Runner-up*

**Top right**

Faisal Maqbool  
Laffin!

*Camera: Candid  
Winner*

**Bottom right**

Isaac Borrego  
RAWR - Thrifty Skaha Sends  
ft. Paul & Julian  
*Camera: Candid  
Runner-up*





**Photos**  
Faisal Maqbool  
*Camera:*  
*Storytelling*  
*Runner-up*



A rare visit to one  
of my favorite  
hill-stations from my  
childhood, back in  
Pakistan.





**Photos**

Joseph Chiao

*Camera: Storytelling  
Winner*



Telemark skiing is a skiing technique that combines elements of Alpine and Nordic skiing, using the rear foot to keep balance while pushing on the front foot to create a carving turn on downhill skis with toe-only bindings



## Photos

Zachary Wirth

Glacier School: Day 1 vs. Day 2 . . . Not much more needs to be said.

Phone: *Storytelling Runner-Up*





## Photos

Imogen Hayes

This year Ivan Fediaev and John Conlon completed our first ever LIVE hut security camera installation on April 1st 2025! “The webcam is powered by STOKE: Solar-Thermal Off-grid Kinetic Energy, a new technology that we are deploying in our backcountry huts. We hope to install projectors in the near future so that livestreaming our favourite content creators will be possible!” This groundbreaking tech also garnered wide spread attention from the r/Vancouverhiking subreddit as well as the Alpine Club of Canada. VOCers in STEM at their finest!

*Phone: Storytelling Winner*

10:25



**Rob Asbeek Brusse**

09:59

À : Adam, Arash, Rob >

## Weather & Security Cam for Haberl Hut

Hi Adam

I saw a posting that VOC had installed a remote weather Cam @ the Burton Hut on Sphinx Bay. The ACC Vancouver Section and General active/recreational users of the area in the vicinity of the Haberl Hut located at just over 2,000 m on the Serratus/Dionne Col could significantly benefit from a similar deployment near our Jim Haberl Memorial Hut.

Could you possibly put me in touch with whoever developed the plans contacts and proposal presented to your club so that i could do the same for our club?

I am sure we could put an acceptable proposal forward to our club and potential funders so as to move forward very quickly on such a project.

Warm regards

Rob





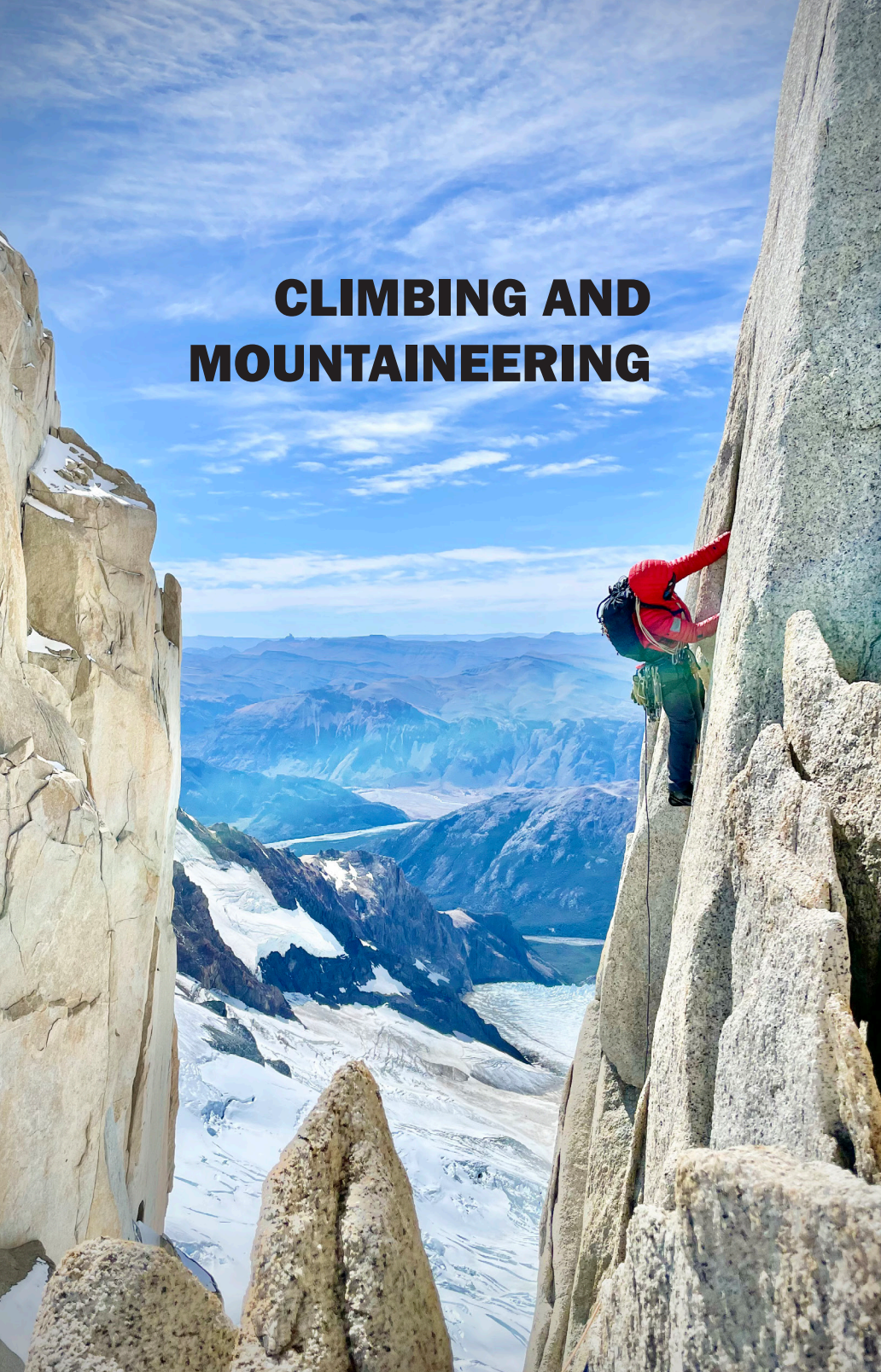
## EDITOR'S PICKS

**Above**  
Faisal Maqbool  
Full Scene ON!  
*Camera: People*

**Left**  
Marcus Athans  
Belay dog flaking his rope  
*Camera: Flora & Fauna*



# **CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING**



# Lessons from Mt. Garibaldi's Bergschrund: a G1 Rescue Story

*Sunny Das*

I need to write this story down lest time and repetitive tellings let it lose its luster and accuracy.

## **The Approach**

Let's start at the beginning. I agreed to attend Jeff Mottershead's Glacier School over the Labour Day long weekend after Joanne Ho asked if I was interested. Famous for its depth and detail far above and beyond the club's annual "G1" Glacier School at Brandywine, I knew this would be one of the only opportunities I had to take the plunge. So, throwing caution to the wind with my already-scattered August brain, I got the necessary gear together, attended the two-hour presentation and four-hour Trimble playground crevasse rescue session.

Jeff gave us three options for the trip: "We could just do glacier school stuff." "We could also try and summit Garibaldi, which would be a good experience because it has a bergschrund so you would learn more." "We could also try to go to Sphinx hut." "We could try to do all three." "It's up to you, I have no objective for this trip." The three of us considered; we were here to learn, weren't we? Garibaldi probably made the most sense. Let's aim for that, we agreed.

Soon enough, I was walking up the Red Heather path, heavy pack on my back, and an expectant glee in my step. We left Jeff's car in the parking lot at around 9:00 am. On the trip was Jeff, Joanne, Marta Oliver, and I. The day was bright with colour and gaiety. We passed by many trail runners on the way up to Elfin, including a former VOCer named Richard that Jeff had a small chat with. The mood was light, and we reached the Elfin Lakes shelter at 11:30 am, taking a pitstop to try and shit so that we wouldn't have to deal with that on the glacier.

**Section cover** Nick Hindley

**Photo** Elfin Lakes in  
the summah  
*Sunny Das*



We continued on, keeping on the trail to Opal Cone. Refilling water at the stream, I appreciated the break from my bag, which was certainly weighing me down at that point. The glacier gear, including my mountaineering boots, helmet and ice axe, on top of my overnight necessities, was quite heavy. Stupidly, I had not brought hiking poles on this trip, and so I suffered more than the other three. Continuing on, I felt myself retreat into an all-too-familiar sufferfest.

Soon, we reached a point where we had to diverge off trail and head forward into the ‘wilderness,’ at which we had not yet arrived. Apparently, Garibaldi Park has separate designations for ‘wilderness’ camping as opposed to ‘backcountry’ camping, and we had to make it to the ‘wilderness’ before dark.

The terrain shifted quickly, from rock and dust to ice sheets below us. Small crevasses ran through the ice, and we picked our way forward carefully, sliding on the slippery surface. Jeff eagerly beckoned us forward and we found ourselves staring into a massive ice dome. Imprints dug into the walls, looking like the ice cube boxes that I put in the freezer. None of us had ever seen anything like it. More photos snapped, and more gasps of wonder leaked out. You really can’t make this shit up.

“Are we in the wilderness yet?” I asked Jeff. “Not yet, but close.” he said.

It was 5:00 pm, and we crested upon another ice dome. Lightning blue ice hung over a deep cave. “We’re going in!” Jeff said. “Helmets on.” He cracked out the ice screws and showed us how to wind them into the ice. “These are strong, they will hold a lot of weight,” he demonstrated, lifting his



**Left** Below the ice... **Right** The approach *Sunny Das*

feet off the ground and dangling from its grip. We each tried putting them in. V-threads were next, practiced on a block of ice sitting outside the cave. Our pitstop was informative, but we still had more ground to cover. So, we left the ice behind and started up the loose rocks, scrambling for quite a while.

Eventually, we came upon a flat section of snow that looked promising for anchor practice. It must have been about 7:00 pm. Setting down our packs, we got out our pickets and ice axes. “This area is fine,” Jeff told us, “there won’t be crevasses here because of how the terrain is. But just to let you know, you generally would want to probe out any area like this to make sure.” We skipped over that step, heading straight for the pickets, making a deadman anchor and a snow bollard. The day was mostly over, and so we retired to cooking, deciding to camp there for the night.

“The weather looks good tomorrow morning,” Jeff said. “We can try Garibaldi in the morning to be sure that we’ll be back before dark and the potential storm.” We were all game and went to sleep quickly for our early start. It looked like we had finally made it into the wilderness.

---

The next morning was as beautiful as promised. We left our camp stuff at 7:00 am and took only our necessary gear up the mountain, stopping at the demolished ‘Neve Hilton’ hut to rope up and belay each other out onto the snow. I was a little nervous—would I remember how to do these steps? It ended up being fine. Jeff led the way, I was behind him, Marta behind me, and Joanne last. We started up.

Soon enough, we were stepping over some small crevasses and a bigger crevasse field stretched in front of us. Looking back at the view, I was again amazed by the sheer fact that I was here. Mount Garibaldi stuck up over the white masses in front of us. How badass is this?

I kept vigilant about rope distance and slack, making sure to evenly space myself out. Falling into a crevasse seemed unlikely, but I was very delighted to have the rope. We walked perpendicular to the crevasses, as we were supposed to, at a moderate pace. A particularly big crevasse made me pause.

“Just go for it,” Jeff said. I lunged slightly, my crampons doing all the hard work. Easy.

We kept going like this, at one point reverting to a Z-shape before walking single-file again. I don’t know how far we walked until it started to get steeper. We had come around to the back face of the mountain, on a steeper snow section. At this point, we could see Mount Garibaldi up close. I was getting tired and was slightly queasy looking below us. How would we get down?

We kept climbing, and I requested a break. “Okay”, Jeff said. “But let’s go a bit farther, because then I can plan our route.” Looking up, Mount Garibaldi was so close. Less than a couple hundred meters of scramble, if that, I supposed. But the scramble looked intense. Slabby rock sections cut into snow, promising a nasty fall if someone were to slip. While I took a break, Jeff assessed our options.

“We can’t go up here,” he determined. “It is too dangerous if we fall. We’ll try to go across instead, to those rocks over there. I’m going to place a picket in as we get to the steeper section.”

I was nervous, wondering how much steeper it could get. As it turned out, much steeper. I followed Jeff, walking with increasing levels of fear. My crampons dug into the hillside, and I took some deep breaths. Below was a 45 degree slope that I was all-too-aware I could slide into at any second, if I wasn’t careful. Intellectually, I knew that we were roped up and attached to a line of pickets, but still, it did little to ease my angst. Jeff walked ahead, punching in steps on the otherwise smooth sloped surface, with Marta behind me and Joanne over at the rear. “Breathe,” I told myself. “Just get across. Don’t look down.” I secretly hoped the section would come to an end faster, but I knew patience was a virtue in this case.

Coming across the first picket, I had to move the sling over to the other side of my rope. Currently, I had an alpine butterfly attached to my harness, and two prusiks on either side. How should I move this sling without letting go from the picket? “Jeff!” I called. “What do I do?” “Clip over to the other rope.” “With what, my prusik?” “No! Not your prusik!” I started fiddling with something or another, not knowing what I was doing. “That looks too complicated! Just move the biner to the other rope!” I didn’t get it. “You mean unclip from the picket?” “Yes!” I unclipped the biner on the sling from my rope and quickly clipped it to the other side of my butterfly. Taking a deep breath, I kept walking. When would this vertigo calm down?

We got to the end of our picket line and approached a narrow ledge. It looked to be a little over one-foot wide, and had a steep drop off on both sides – to the right, a gaping hole (Garibaldi’s bergschrund), to the left, a shallower hole with rocks and snow. Across the ledge was an imposing mass of towering rocks that we could not see over. Jeff marched on, across the narrow ledge, and I tentatively followed, trying not to think too hard. When Jeff reached the other

side, he punched his ice axe into the snow, slung the rope around his back, and began to belay me in. Finally, I reached the rocks.

Turning around, I saw Marta coming behind me and it was my turn to belay her in. I began the motions, interrupted by a “HOLY SHIT” from behind me. Jeff was looking over the other side of the rocks we were leaning up against. “There’s a 200 m drop on this side!” he reported with a child-like glee and voice full of awe.

He instructed Marta to belay Joanne across and finally, we were all standing on a small patch of hard snow, leaned against the rocks. I took my backpack off and though I knew I was theoretically pretty safe, the steep drop two feet in front of me made me clutch it hard, scared gravity would somehow perform a weird twist, reach up, and take it away from me.

“So as you’ve probably guessed, we’re not summiting Garibaldi today.” Jeff said, somewhat apologetically. “There’s no way to get around on this side.”

I had little disappointment in the turn of events. The view was breathtaking even from where we stood. I tried to recall when I had seen a view this gorgeous and comprehensive. To my left, the rock face we were leaning on framed Garibaldi Lake. Black Tusk pierced the sky and the water below shined blue. As you scanned right, Sentinel Mountain looked over the waters and further on, Castle Towers squatted like a king. We were about eye-level with its summit, meaning we were, elevation wise, very close to the summit of Garibaldi. More mountains sprawled out and across as far as the eye could see, with names and histories I could not recount but with a present allure that could only be described as beauty.

“We can hang out here for a bit and then go on back,” Jeff said. “I’m going to take a look over this other side and get a picture.” His crampons scratched against the rock as he moved up to get a better view. “WOW.” he pulled out his phone and started taking photographs.

I clipped my backpack to my harness, realizing that was a much more secure-way to prevent its possible tumble. Joanne, Marta, and I couldn’t stop remarking to each other on the view. There was so much to take in, you couldn’t stay in the awesome-ness for too long. We had to joke around, reflect on how we were so glad we came, how we had never seen anything better, before looking up again and being re-hit with the majesty of the sprawl laid out before us. Wouldn’t we have such a great story to tell?

Jeff invited us each to look at what lay behind the rocks. I went first, edging up the rocks, eager to drink in the sites. “Woahhh...” For what do you really say when you are asked to take in nature’s behind-the-scenes? The drop down was indeed 200 m. Garibaldi curved to my left in a concave dome, with multi-coloured glaciers sliding down the austere slabs. In the horizon lay more mountains than I could count, while in the foreground a greenery contrasted against the tundra landscape. It was nothing short of epic.

Joanne and Marta took their own looks, and their reaction was the same. How lucky were we to be here on this shining Sunday afternoon, in a spot most humans would never dream of reaching? It would have been nice to stay for longer, but eventually, we had to go back. Jeff started arranging our rope and we put our backpacks on. There was so much rope pooled at our feet. It didn't look organized, so Joanne, Marta, and I flaked it out.

"You should really be using your ice axes, not your poles," Jeff told Marta and Joanne. The entire way across, they had been stabilizing themselves on two hiking poles, their ice axes in their packs. Joanne shrugged. "I feel safer with my poles," she said. "They are really not as stable," Jeff reiterated, but didn't fight.

"Okay, let's get down to business. Joanne, you're going to have to go first because we have to go in the opposite direction. I'll be last for safety. Marta, you're going to belay Joanne out and then follow her. Sunny, you'll belay Marta out. I'll belay you. Marta, you can get started setting up your axe belay."

Since the two of them were blocking me, I stayed out of the way and watched as Joanne started across the ledge. Marta moved the rope around her waist to belay her out. Once she got far enough, I moved to grab my pack and set up my own belay system. Ice axe in the snow, rope through a biner, around my waist – I was ready. Marta started moving out and I kept belaying, giving more and more rope.

She got to about mid-way across the one-foot ledge and I realized I didn't have my gloves on. They were still in my pack. "Jeff, can you get those for me?" I asked. "They're in the back pocket."

"Yes," said Jeff. "Hold on though, I'm also trying to untangle the rope here. You guys shouldn't have moved it, I had it nicely in place."

I looked down and saw some tangles that I didn't understand. "Marta, stop," Jeff called. "We're untangling the rope."

"Okay!" Marta responded.

I reached for my gloves, my heart rate accelerating by the messiness and confusion. How can I reorganize? I felt slightly responsible for the mishaps.

## **The Fall**

In a flash, I hear a scream. I see Marta, halfway across the ledge, ski poles in hand, poised in position to catch the stumble, but not the fall. Her body and pack tip over to the left, with no time to fold in on themselves or react. Like a pendulum, she rotates off her feet, and the next thing I know, I can't see her. The rope shoots forward and I am yanked, with no time to think or process, the alarm bells blaring in my mind.

*Marta fell  
how did she fall*

## VOCJ68

*what is happening*  
*Is this death*  
*Am I falling*  
*why am I in pain*

My heartbeat is racing at a speed god only knows.

I have no memory of my slide forward in the snow, or of stopping myself with my crampons. My next image was one of a raging stillness, my ice axe lying two feet in front of me, useless and abandoned, Marta out of sight, my legs twisted, and the most roaring pain coursing through my thighs. Though I am still, for that moment, I don't trust that it is over. My breath doesn't catch up because I am anticipating the further fall, because there must be a further fall, because my anchor is out and my legs are tied and because I was, two seconds ago, sliding off the steepest ridge I have ever walked on.

One millisecond. Two milliseconds. Three milliseconds. I don't move. What the fuck is going on.

"Is everyone okay?" I hear a voice behind me. It's Jeff. He must be holding on to me. I hear crying from down below.

What happened to Marta? What's happening to me? With each second, the rope digs further into my legs and I am trapped in my pain and fear. Am I going to get out of this? What will happen if I mess with the rope? I can't move. Where is Marta? Tears start welling up in my eyes. My mind is blank except for fear. I am frozen and suspended in time, captive. I trust no one, especially not gravity. In my mind, the laws of the universe no longer apply.

### **The Rescue**

"Sunny, what do we have to build an anchor?" Jeff says. Snapped back to the moment, I have to think, but I can't.

"An ice screw..." my voice wobbles... "I can't remember what else... Jeff... I can't." My voice breaks as I almost break into tears. The rope bites in more. Fear licks its open wound. Blooming in pain, I can't think. And I can't cry.

I hear noises and Jeff looks over me. "Oh, I didn't realize you were this tied up," he says. "We have to get you out first." I can only agree and nod. We hear more sounds from down below, Joanne's voice added to the mix. I can't see either of them, but only stand witness to the broken communication that follows. I think Marta wants to be lowered.

"Marta, we need five minutes! We can't lower you yet," Jeff calls. More voices call back. I don't think she understood. Or maybe it's too late. Maybe there's nothing to do.

Jeff plays with the rope and somehow ends up sitting in front of me.

To be honest, I don't remember much from these next moments. He is busy setting something up, securing his position. He doesn't ask much from me, because I am not much help. In a state of shock, I try to prevent myself from falling apart.

"Scootch closer to me," he says. "We need to get you out."

I don't respond at first – how can I move? I feel frozen, the terror imprisoning me in its iron grip.

"It won't get better until you move. You need to come closer."

I inch over, scootching across the snow, and the load lessens. I manage to get untangled from the rope, finally free of the tension. Standing up, I try to get my bearings. Breathe in, breathe out. What the hell happened?

At this point, I'll briefly turn to Jeff's memory, as the exact details of the rescue steps are foggy. He recounts the story like this:

1. To get the Garibaldi attempt in during the good weather, I didn't get to self arrest practice until after we needed it.
2. I said it was ice axe time, but people didn't want to use them. I should have said no, you have to.
3. Joanne was mislocked in the kicked steps, with her right foot should have been where her left was.
4. Joanne was past the end of the bergschrund, almost at the picket when she fell. She slid past the end of the bergschrund, but as she started to pendulum she pulled Marta off.
5. I'm not 100% sure what happened to your standing axe belay, but my best guess is that you stepped back to brace yourself and that took your foot off the axe.
6. Without you standing on the axe, the redirect through your harness pulls the axe up.
7. I was on the rope, but because you were belaying out, a bunch of slack was generated when the belay popped out.

*I think that's the full "how we ended up in a pickle". Different people made different mistakes, but it's all on me because I was the one that was supposed to be instructing. Up to this point, it was a series of shameful failures. From here on in, though, I functioned half-assed properly.*

1. I saw you falling, so I grabbed the brake line, wrapped it around my hand and went into self-arrest. I was expecting to really mess up my hand but hold the fall.
2. It stopped pretty easily. The rope was wrapped around you from the belay, and you were providing a fair bit of extra friction. Joanne's rope, now over the lip of the downhill side the bergschrund probably helped tiny too, but

- it was nearly horizontal between Marta and where it was hung up.
3. I used my other hand to connect myself to the brake line with a prusik, made an anchor with your axe and connected the taught end of the rope to the axe with a prusik. Because this didn't have a redirect up to a standing belayer, it probably would have been fine without me standing on it, but I wasn't going to take any chances. I stood on it while I got you to wriggle forwards and take tension off of you.
  4. I got you to get my axe, and I used it to back up your axe.
  5. I kicked steps down to where I could communicate with Marta, and she said she could walk out if she was lowered a bit.
  6. I used a munter on my axe, and tensioned to unweight the prusik on your axe. I got you to mind the prusik on your axe as I lowered Marta.

So there I am, as my memory recalls. Minding the prusik with my brain abuzz. I am shivering. Suddenly, it had gotten very cold. The change in weather reminds me to look up at the sky, where I see some dark clouds gathering. It was supposed to thunderstorm that night, hence our morning trip to Garibaldi before practicing self arrest. If we couldn't get out of this mess, we might be caught. Is my shivering from the cold, or from fear? Probably a combination of both.

We hear calls from down below, and apparently, it is done – Marta got out of the bergschrund. I can't quite see her and Joanne below, so I keep taking deep breaths and try to combat the circling thoughts. Do I tell my mom about this? I voice my concerns to Jeff. "What, that the systems work," he remarks. We aren't out of it yet, I say. Let's not jinx the systems.

As they are trying to climb out – Joanne first, thrusting her axe into the snow as she climbs up the slope – followed by Marta, the rope gets stuck. Joanne yells instructions down to Marta but it seems they cannot figure it out. Back down they go to untangle the rope. Standing on the ledge with little understanding of what is going on or how we will get out of that mess, I continue to shiver. A new intrusive thought appears – what if I forgot my headlamp? I can't remember putting it in my bag. I imagine trying to traverse the rest of the crevasse fields in the dark. It's getting to be too much – will we ever get out of here? I voice my concerns to Jeff. Less because I expect a response, and more because I feel the need to talk incessantly and drown out the silence that is expanding the waiting time from one hour into infinity.

I look down at Joanne and Marta, who are still untangling the rope. Eventually, Jeff gives them a piece of advice and it works. They start going up again, and all I can do is watch listlessly. As they ascend, a rainbow appears, peeping through the misty air, arcing above Garibaldi lake. How absurd. Though it feels wrong, in such a moment, I whip out my phone and take a photo.

Joanne and Marta end up back on the foot-long ledge from where Marta had fallen. They straddle the snow, setting up a belay so that Joanne can (more) safely try again to get to the picket and clip in. The whole process seems like slow-motion. First, Marta needs her jacket. Then they fiddle with the rope. After that, Joanne starts moving. “DON’T EDGE!” Jeff yells. Joanne, in her normal light-hearted humor, starts going down. The whole thing doesn’t seem to have phased her much, the thought of slipping again doesn’t seem to haunt her. What if she falls back down?

“I can’t watch,” I tell Jeff. But I keep watching. My heart thumps, and I wish the next moments would come quicker than they do. Joanne stumbles. My heart drops. For the first time in my life, I pray to Jesus. I’m not religious, but I feel the need to call in a superior deity. Joanne recovers. A few more steps, and she’s clipped into the picket.

### **The Recovery**

Relief. Rejoice. Move.

Jeff starts across the ledge as I belay him out. Soon enough, I’m following, placing extreme importance on keeping two points of contact with the snow at all times. Crampons dig in while the ice axe holds me steady. Making progress and keeping my focus locked in feels infinitely easier than the endless waiting of the past couple of hours. I reach the picket and wait for Joanne to clip into the one she just arrived at. I struggle to clip the picket to my pack, but I remain calm, focusing on the task at hand. This is all I need to do; nothing else is important. Nothing else exists. There is no real reason to panic anymore, save for the residual fear that something might go wrong. We continue to descend.

As quickly as the fall itself, we are suddenly out of the dangerous zone. Now, we just have to get home.

Without poles myself (a naive trekker I am), I step and slide down the snow with the help of my axe. The three of them walk in front of me, the view once again astonishing. Garibaldi lake hangs to the left, the mountains looming up above and all around. A second rainbow appears out of the mist, and this time, I am free to enjoy its company. What an oddly circular conclusion to the story that just unfolded. I stop to take photos, and my heart thumps happily at the sight of nature’s beauty once more. There is pure joy found in just the act of being alive.

We turn back to look at the fall zone. We can see the imprints in the snow from where Joanne and Marta slid. We are so far away now, but it still looks impressive. The steep slide and the memory of being up there are fresh. What a wonder we made it down.

Eventually, we make it back to the “Neve Hilton,” the old VOC hut. Taking off our gear and crampons, we finally have the time to debrief.

“I thought I was dead,” Marta exclaims, with a morbid awe and fear that comes only after having witnessed your life falling before your eyes. “I thought so too,” I said. “Or, at least, I thought there was a good possibility I could die.” The memories and ruminations kick in and we all scramble to tell our piece of the story. “What, you felt that?” “What, that’s what happened to you?” as we compile our experiences, revelations, and fears. The morbid curiosity at what had just unfolded and the miracle of being safe carried along with the words across the snow. My legs hurt, and I would soon realize that there were bruises on either side where the rope had dug into them. It didn’t matter. We were free, we were alive – we had made it.

We got back to the campsite and started up dinner. Still bitterly laughing and sharing our moments of fear from the day, we shook our heads, wondering at the story we would have to tell and who we would tell it to. Jeff apologized, letting us know that he had never experienced a crevasse fall except for someone simply punching in. It wasn’t great that we had gone through that, and he would never repeat that exercise again. But, he and we acknowledged, we did learn more from that experience than most people would at any other glacier school.

“Goodnight Marta,” I yawned. “Don’t dream of crevasses.”

I slept fine that night, although not as well as the previous one. Marta woke up rattled. She had indeed dreamed of falling into a crevasse. I could go on to recount that day, which included three crevasse rescues (this time on purpose), dumping Joanne into freezing water three times while trying to rescue her, and hiking back the way we came. I’ll spare the other details of that Labour day, as the trip report is long enough as it is and some memories are better left for the photographs to take care of. Instead, I’ll end with one final reflection.

### **The Reflection**

It is now two weeks later. The rest of the VOC is currently at G1, out at Brandywine. I opted out of instructing last minute, deciding instead to rest up and reflect. It is odd to look back on the experience and shake my head, knowing I would have done things completely differently if I had had the chance. I made avoidable mistakes, gave into an ‘expert halo’ I should not have, and put myself at risk.

For those who don’t know, ‘expert halo’ refers to the cognitive bias in which the group defaults to the perceived experience of a single member, even when their expertise is not relevant or complete. Though I’ve heard of this phenomenon and have been cautioned against falling into its trap before, it can be difficult to recognize when I should speak up and voice my concerns versus when I might benefit from being pushed to do something I might not believe I can do. It is a balance, and it is far from a perfect science. Risk taking and risk tolerance is deeply individual – as Jeff, Joanne, Marta, and I have all reflected

upon since the fall.

Looking back, I am still grateful for the experience I had. Beyond the fall, there were moments of beauty and peace out in the glacier fields that one can rarely find in the bustle of the daily life of the city. The mountains give so much to me – I would not want to close myself off from their embrace. I don't think any of us should. Instead, we should give them, and ourselves, the respect deserved. This trip report was not intended to blame anyone for the decisions they made at Garibaldi. Rather, in reporting near-misses like this one, I aim to learn from the experience and fully process its importance. Hopefully, when others read this story and listen to my internal dialogue, they will reflect on their position as mountaineers and learn something about what that means.

**Left** Marta and Joanne were straddling the snow ridge, getting re-adjusted  
**Right** to: Home *Sunny Das*





*Top to bottom*

**1** Overhead view of Skaha bluffs Sunday morning.  
*Isaac Borrego*



**2** A goat at the crag.  
*Isaac Borrego*

**Below**  
Overhead of Skaha Bluffs and Skaha Lake.  
*Isaac Borrego*



# Thrifty Skaha Sends Halloween 2025

*Julian Lapenna*

*Skaha Bluffs Provincial Park*

*Oct 30-Nov 2 2025*

*Participants: Isaac Borrego (organizer), Fabian Ernsting, Amelia Kaag, Anna Hrbacova, Jakob Assan, Paul Ramu, Julian Lapenna, Livio Gruenenfelder, Logan Vaughan, Crystal Yim, Ian Yoon, Raven Butterfield, Franky Zhou, Timothy Seah, Filipa Fay Moreira, Kes Colbert, Moritz (Mo) Aubermann, Melissa Chen, Lillian McCallum, Carvin Müns, Judith Ko, Yuze Zhou, Julien Pieters, Katrin Lindenhahn.*

Skaha Lake, and Skaha Bluffs Provincial Park are absolutely stunning destinations surrounded by mountains, hills, beautiful trees and wildlife, and housing tons of top-notch sport climbing on Gneiss rock. A few minutes south of Penticton, and (approximately) a five hour drive from Vancouver, the VOC hosted their annual Thrifty Skaha Sends trip over Halloween of 2025.

The game-plan was to buy some fun costumes at a thrift store, and do some awesome climbing in fantastic fashion.

## **Day 0: The Commute**

I was scheduled to join the first car to Skaha on Thursday at 5:00 pm with Mo Aubermann, Fabian Ernsting, Livio Gruenenfelder, and our driver, Paul Ramu. We met an hour earlier at the Salvation Army thrift store to look for costumes, each finding a few items to stash for later. Afterward, Livio and Fabian picked up groceries, and we returned to pick up Mo and load everyone's gear.

Isaac Borrego, the trip organizer, had lent Paul his truck, giving us plenty of room for food, camping gear, climbing gear, and costumes. We made good progress until about 20 minutes before Hope, BC, when traffic came to a standstill. Paul slowed the car as we approached, eventually joining the

gridlock and stopping altogether. At first, we sat still, but as the minutes turned to hours, we got restless, spending time walking, getting out food for snacking, and trying to nap.

Unfortunately, as we learned from a crash report online, there was a multi-vehicle crash with fatalities, leading to both stretches of the highway being completely closed while the crash was investigated.

Just before midnight cars began to move. Paul was keen on getting in that night, so after a 4 hour delay, we had a quick stop in Hope for gas and food, and drove the rest of the night. We arrived at the campsite at 3:00 am on Friday, pitched our tents and went straight to sleep.

### **Day 1: The Arrivals**

Friday was the day that most people arrived. That morning, we woke up at around 9:00 am, made breakfast and prepared to head to the crag. We saw a message from Isaac, who had set out so early, that he was going to reach the crag around the same time as us, so it looked like leaving a day early wasn't doing us any favours so far.

Upon reaching the crag, it was still cold (around 6 °C) and also windy. As I am very susceptible to the cold, this meant that instead of crushing 5.12s, I was struggling on 5.7s feeling like my fingers were icicles ready to shatter at any moment!

Others fared much better. Fabian and Jakob got up to a 2-pitch multi, and once other cars began arriving people split off on other climbs. I stayed with Paul, Mo, Kes Colvert, Filipa Fay Moreira, Judith Ko, Amelia Kaag, and Yuze Zhou moving down to Another Buttress, which was a bit warmer, out of the wind, and featured some easy trad climbs.

Once the sun started to set, we wrapped up, satisfied with our climbs, headed back to camp, and joined up with more cars that were arriving to have dinner around a campfire. Since I don't camp often I had some simple meals that just needed hot water. On the other end of the spectrum, I was quite impressed by the camping experts who were cooking pasta sauces and stir fries.

People slowly filtered out from the campfire, layered up, and went to bed for the night.

### **Day 2: Rain or Shine we Climb**

Saturday morning marked November 1st. Everyone awoke around 8:00 am and huddled around the picnic table making breakfast and planning which crags to hit. The radar called for some rain in the afternoon, so we wanted to squeeze in what we could before then.

I returned to the same crag with Paul and Mo, and we were joined by Isaac, Lillian, Yuze, and Judith. We only got to climbing one or two routes before the rain picked up so we cleaned the remaining routes and retreated to

the car.

A few groups were over at Doctor's Wall, a hard wall featuring 5.11s and 5.12s with a wicked overhang. So while it was still windy, they were well sheltered from the rain, and got to continue climbing.

Not wanting to hang out in the wet and cold, Paul and Isaac drove our groups into Penticton. We went for ice cream (Tickleberry's Downtown, delicious btw.) while waiting for the rain to pass. Once the sun came out, we went for a walk to see the metal dinosaur and got a great view of the town and the Okanagan Lake.

Finally, before returning to camp, we all stopped at the local thrift store for anyone who was still missing a costume. The weather said clouds were blowing over so we planned to sport our costumes on Sunday while climbing. Lillian and I set out to get Isaac a dinosaur costume thinking we could make a play on words with his last name: Isaac Borrego would become Isaac the Borregosaurus.

### **Day 3: Clear Skies and Sending**

Sunday morning, we awoke to clear and sunny skies and knew that it would be a solid day of climbing. Stoke was high. No one wasted time, instead scarfing down food in a scramble to get to the crags as early as possible.

Climbing with the same group we went to Red Tail Wall, and started with some 5.9s and easy 5.10s. With the sun out, and a light breeze, the conditions were perfect. I put on my costume of a clubber from Hawaii; Lillian McCallum put on her matching costume; Paul put on his cheetah costume; Isaac put on his Borregosaurus outfit; and Mo wore his dancer costume. Yuze and Judith did a short multipitch, and the rest of us worked on some cool looking sport routes.

**Left** Climbers in their costumes *Franky Zhou*

**Right** Climbers in their costumes *Isaac Borrego*



## VOCJ68

While Isaac was mostly taking pictures (which were fantastic!), Paul and I climbed some awesome moderates, switching with Mo and Lillian. Two of my favourites were Hiking With Howie, and Preface. Both showcased the amazing crimpy gneiss of Skaha, with Hiking with Howie featuring committing moves over a fantastic roof, and Preface challenging us with various thin feet.

In the afternoon, we moved over to the Seven Dwarfs Wall for some more easy trad. It featured some short cracks, and slabby climbs on small features. With an easy hike to the top, Isaac managed to capture some great (and goofy) angles from above. We had a blast, rotating trad leads, and setting topropes on the harder climbs.

Paul, Isaac, and I took a break before the sun set and hiked to the top of the Fortress, the overlooking mountain behind the Seven Dwarfs Wall. Looking out from the top, we saw the bluffs glowing in the low sun and Skaha Lake stretched beneath them as the whole valley settled. We finally returned, took our group photo in costume, and packed up.

On the way out we met up with other groups, got to see their costumes, and lastly packed the car for the drive home. Special thanks to Isaac Borrego (the Borregosaurus) for many beautiful photos.



**Left** Climbers in their costumes. *Melissa Chen*  
**Below** Me belaying Paul on a climb at Seven Dwarfs Wall *Isaac Borrego*



# My Shocking First Trip to the Bugaboos

*Julian Larsen*

*June 28th - July 4th*

*Bugaboos, BC*

*Participants: Julian Larsen, Evan Wong, Lydia Duncan, Alex Koen*

**L**ocated in the Purcell mountains south of Golden, BC, the Bugaboos are one of the best alpine climbing destinations in North America and (in my opinion) one of the most beautiful places on earth. Last year, my plans to visit were thwarted by a forest fire that jumped the highway and put the whole area south of Golden under evacuation order. This year, I took my only week off work to get my dream summer trip.

After much fuff getting a team set up, and some last minute bails, we had Evan Wong, Alex Koen, Lydia Duncan, and me. Despite talking about this trip non-stop for months, we really didn't start serious planning or packing until a few days before.

The trip ended up being a great success, despite some key goals not being possible due to conditions and logistics. Overall I climbed:

Day 1: "Roof McTech", "Energy Crisis"

Day 2: "Kain Route" (Bugaboo Spire)

Day 3: "Minotaur Direct" (first five pitches only, but SOOO good)

Day 4: "Surfs Up"

Day 5: "Solitary Confinement" (we froze to death, but it was incredible nonetheless)

While I could ramble on for hours about the climbing, I thought I would limit this report to the most interesting story of the trip, which happened on probably the easiest route...

Although the forecast had originally called for a torrential downpour

on Wednesday, by Tuesday evening the camp weather bulletin showed only 0.2 mm remaining in the afternoon and none on Thursday. This meant that our rest day had disappeared and it was time for yet more climbing (yay?). Now, I am not too concerned about 0.2 mm of rain, but I was worried that this could be a signal of a thunderstorm (though the weather forecast did not specifically mention it). Evan and I figured we could simul-climb an easier route and get back to camp by early afternoon to avoid the weather anyway. We decided on the classic 5.9 on Snowpatch spire: “Surf’s Up”. Alex and Lydia had gotten back late the day before, so they were unsure about joining Evan and me, but Evan really wanted a third or fourth person so he could get photos of people climbing (and not the dreaded top-rope shots from the belay station). This meant that our quick wake-up turned into another sluggish morning interspersed with the question: “Are you sure you don’t want to come?” several times towards the quiet tent of Alex and Lydia. Eventually Lydia broke and decided to join, causing Evan and I to relax our prepping pace even more, since Lydia just woke up – oh nevermind, she’s already ready and we still aren’t...

The first two pitches of Surf’s Up were long with somewhat interesting climbing, but as the leader I found them wandery and poorly-protected. Luckily they were easy because it was not a place to fall. Unfortunately, on the second pitch, I got to the end of the rope with no good belay stance in sight and made a hanging belay in a narrow chimney. Frustrated with managing two ropes at this terrible belay, I sent Evan off for the next lead and said I would follow on a fixed line instead to reduce faff. Evan did his first lead (the crux) relatively fast up to an alcove, and then decided to take the next lead (described as a short 5.7) as well. This is when our day started to go from slower than we

**Photo** Approaching the climb with Pigeon Spire behind *Evan Wong*



had hoped to genuinely concerning. Evan climbed and down-climbed about every possible line off of the belay, each time reaching a point outside the alcove and determining this was definitely off route. While Evan was preoccupied with his puzzling lead, Lydia and I began to violently shiver at the belay. It was not very warm, it was windy, and we were in the shade. Thinking we wouldn't be sitting at the belays much, we hadn't brought all of our layers. Every few minutes I would look out of the alcove to see increasingly large clouds flying by the mountain. I think at this point I was the only one genuinely concerned about thunderstorms.

"Evannnn... I know this isn't what you want to hear right now, but you've gotta find us a way outta here as fast as possible" (It was indeed not what he wanted to hear right then).

Eventually, Evan spotted the correct line from off route and came down to finally take the right direction (which was apparently a dead horizontal traverse that our screenshotted beta did not make clear). By the time he made it to the next belay the first cracks of thunder could be heard in the distance and the wind had picked up into a violent maelstrom. As I arrived, Evan handed me the gear and said "JULIAN. RAGE!" The final few pitches to the summit are the reason this route is so highly rated. While the first few are wandery and loose, the final few are a splitter hand-crack on bulletproof granite. With the adrenaline rush of the storm smashing into us I flew up the crack. The climbing was amazing, but I certainly didn't have time to soak it in. I might've set a speed record climbing a full 60 m in what felt like a minute or two. I set up a belay in a corner and Lydia and Evan followed extremely fast as well. Evan's pack cover got ripped off his pack mid-climb, flying a few hundred metres to the right and out of sight in a matter of seconds. Then, in a complete reversal of wind direction, it whipped back left, flying by us again and sailing off into the distant mountain ranges past the famous "Hound's Tooth". Suffice to say the wind was no joke at this point.

I started another adrenaline-fueled climb up the wall above me. About 20 m up, a new gust of wind hit that was truly hurricane force. It brought with it hail that was going in seemingly all directions through the air. With the truly outrageous weather around me my adrenaline rush had hit a crescendo and I screamed with joy as I flew up the wall (Evan and Lydia were apparently quite confused). Just like the wind had switched directions on a dime, this high switched to a massive low in an instant. My legs began suddenly stinging, I brought my hand to my thigh to see if I was getting pinched by something, and the cam on my harness shocked my hand. With the sudden realization that I was a lightning rod on a barren mountain, my emotions switched instantly to intense fear as I dropped to my knees in the corner of a small ledge. I placed a cam in the crack above me and between gusts of wind I heard it buzzing loudly.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no. What am I doing here? Why me?" I pressed my-

self into the corner to hide from the statically charged atmosphere around me. I tried to communicate to Lydia what was going on, but my cracking voice didn't make it through the chaotic wind. Above me the cracks were cresting onto the open ridge along the top of the spire. Being up on the exposed ridgeline seemed like suicide in a lightning storm, and I wasn't sure there would be shelter of any kind, so I figured it might be best to lower. The wind calmed for a few seconds and I stood up to yell down to Lydia. I was instantly shocked through my pants, and sent back to a cowering position. I decided to unrack all of my gear and clip it to the piece above me before getting Lydia to lower me back down.

In the relative security of the larger corner at the belay, I still glued myself to the ground, explaining through broken words what was going on. We collectively decided it was not the best idea to be on the ridge and that we would wait for a more solid break in the storm. We threw the packs on our legs and huddled in a fetal position shivering as wind and hail battered us from all sides. This was NOT fun. Shivering at the belay with thunder booming around us and hail battering our cheeks was probably one of my least favourite experiences of all time and potentially the most scared I've ever been.

Since this climb had no anchors and a traverse pitch, going down wasn't really viable (plus not much more sheltered than going up). We had two options: stay and wait, or top out and rappel off the regular descent. The pessimistic outcomes if the storm didn't break were that we would sit at the belay and become hypothermic as the cold alpine night arrived, or that we would try going up and would be struck by lightning. Neither of those sounded great so we prayed that we had at least a bit of luck and hoped for a break in the storm. Looking at Mountain Project to confirm info on the rappel route, we saw a comment about being on the summit during a thunderstorm with visible electrical arcing between cams and burning clothing and skin...

After about an hour there seemed to be a break and we decided we had to go for it. I started racing back up the pitch fueled by fear. I grabbed my rack and slung it around my neck as I ran up to the ridge. I spotted a boulder on the ridge and ran towards it, diving underneath to create the next belay. I did this for one more short pitch, and then we scrambled the rest of the way. I went ahead and darted around the summit block (stumbling through a patch of snow that was much deeper than I had expected) looking for signs of the rappel anchors while keeping myself as low to the ground as possible. I spotted them from afar and went to set up, relieved this experience was nearing its conclusion.

Luckily the break in the weather was relatively solid, and the rappels were uneventful. While we got a bit more thunder and rain on the hike down the glacier, it wasn't nearly as bad as being on top of a 3000+ metre spire.

We had planned to have a restful afternoon at camp after a short and easy climb, but I found myself sauntering back in the evening, once again fully

*Top to bottom*

**1** Lydia Dunkin walking past Bugaboo Spire after getting off “Surf’s Up”

*Evan Wong*



**2** The passing storm after getting back to camp.

*Evan Wong*



**Below**

*Huddling during a brief moment of respite from the storm*

*Evan Wong*



## VOCJ68

drained by a long day in the Bugaboos.

Alex had a calm rest day, but decided to do a quick scramble up East-post Spire just as the storm rolled in and had a bit of his own adventure as well.

### Final Note:

I felt the need to write about this as soon as possible, because “type 2 fun” delusion is REAL. I already find myself looking back on this somewhat fondly, but I need it in writing that I actually had a terrible time (during the storm). Thunderstorms are no joke, and even if you can do something in a bit of rain, I think it is best to assume the worst (that the rain entails a thunderstorm) when climbing in big mountains. If I were to redo that day I would choose a route that I can easily rappel off of and bail as soon as bigger clouds start rolling in. While it would suck to bail on a route just because you saw some scary clouds that never amounted to anything, I would do this many times over if it meant avoiding a life-threatening situation even once. How much was my life actually threatened by a few electric shocks from my climbing gear? I don’t know, but I didn’t feel like finding out.

On a lighter note, the Bugaboos are an amazing and magical place that everyone should visit. I would encourage people not to be so intimidated. There are things for all levels and abilities. Everything from low commitment scrambling and easy trad multipitching to ultra-committing alpine walls rivalling the size and difficulty of El Capitan. Just make sure you research the skills required for what you want to do (usually glacier travel is required). Even if you are not big on climbing, walking the glacier from camp to East Creek (to climb Solitary Confinement) was one of the most beautiful “hikes” I’ve ever done. Don’t ever put yourself in danger, but don’t be overly intimidated either. Get out there!

**Photo** The intrepid Bugaboos Crew standing in front of Snowpatch Spire at camp. *Evan Wong*



# Gruncles of Underground 2025

*Ivan Fediaev*

*November 8 - 10, 2025*

*Northern Vancouver Island*

*Participants: Noah Depner, Alex Levy, Ivan Fediaev, Megan Schenk, Michael Sugiamto, Raymond MacNeil, Oscar Kearsley, Tristan Pinsonneault-Marotte*

## Preamble

Of all the outdoor activities that I have tried, caving has been the most exciting and memorable one so far. Caving blends together so well what I greatly enjoy from rock climbing and mountaineering: technical rope skills needed to descend into the unknown and re-emerge back into the world, the sense of adventure that comes from the exploration of the unknown, and the satisfaction that comes with enduring and overcoming the challenges faced along the way. Caves also have this utterly otherworldly feel to them that make it difficult to believe that they are natural formations and not some divine creation. Their entrances are hidden through temperate rainforests and as you walk admiring the lush green flora that envelopes you, they emerge out of nowhere: a hole in the of the earth that looks like a portal, a gaping fissure ripping apart the ground, or a massive arch in the side of a huge rockface. It's no surprise that caving has a spot in the zeitgeist of the great outdoors.

## Day 1 – Voyage to the North Island, The R in ARGO-Resonance

In order to give us as much time as possible to get to camp and then get to our first cave, a 4:40 am pickup time was decided to get to the ferry on time. I waited on the street with all my bags sprawled out on the curb as packing ultraheavy with all my creature comforts was appropriate. I was waiting on a dead quiet street as Noah Depner and his mighty Delica pulled up. We were off to the races. Oscar Kearsley from Australia, where they drive on the left,

was pleasantly surprised when the driver's seat was on the right side. Topics of discussion included caving in Australia. We boarded the ferry and were on our way. Naps were tried to be had but a good sleeping position can never be had. There was a glorious sunrise and Alex Levy and Raymond MacNeil had a deep and insightful hour-long conversation with two others on the ferry.

We got back into our cars as we approached the dock and then set off to the North Island. A stop on the way to A&W bore success. We were fueled up and a container of seasoning salt was borrowed for our chili dinner. A final stop later in Campbell River to Superstore, the BC Cannabis Store, and the liquor store was warranted to buy some essential supplies before we departed for our final leg of the journey to the Anutz Lake Recreation Campsite. Camp was set up and the eating area was covered with a contrived setup of tarps that would protect us from any rainfall that weekend. We finished setting up at 3:00 pm and then left for the first cave we explored, which was Resonance, one of three connected caves that make up the ARGO Cave System: Arch, Resonance, and Glory 'Ole. The road up to the ARGO entrance was one of the bumpiest roads that I have been on. The waterbars and cross-ditches felt huge and were at times a challenge for the high clearance Delica. I was certain that Tristan Pinsonneault-Marotte's Rav4 would not have been able to make it up and that they would have to hike up the remainder of the road, but much to my surprise they kept following us, finding their way around every obstacle. We arrived at the trailhead and geared up for the cave. Some cavers from the University of Victoria's Caving Club emerged from the darkness of the forest. Wet and covered in mud, they chatted with us for a bit about what our plans were for the evening and then we started the approach.

It was about a 10 minute approach to the entrance of the cave, which was a comical looking hole in the side of a rockwall about the height of an adult. We started in the dark and entered at around 6:00 pm, starting our uncomfortable trek into Resonance. With the height of the ceiling shortening, a crouched walk was necessary to descend deeper through what felt like a seemingly too perfectly shaped tube through the ground. The first sights of cave spiders and crickets were to be seen with a large colony of crickets all clumped together. A disturbing sight. We made our way down the tube and eventually reached a fork in the cave where the left was a rappel through some low flowing water down further into Resonance, and the right was more walking through wet mud. Alex, Oscar, and Michael Sugiamto were excited by the thought of walking through mud and charged through. I was feeling apprehensive about getting myself wet and dirty so quickly, but I figured that fun would follow and so I went. The group naturally split in two with Noah rigging a rope for Ray, Meg Schenk, and Tristan rappelling deeper into Resonance, and us further into the mud. Shortly after going through some muddy bits, we were greeted with a giant stalagmite on the ground that was about a foot tall. We kept going into

the cave until we hit a steep part that looked like it could be climbed down but looked challenging to get back up. Alex and Oscar took the leap of faith and went ahead while Michael and I waited from above. Thankfully for us, Noah went to get his gear bag so that he could set up a hand line from a nearby bolt to make the ascent easier. We headed down and explored a cool room that had a petri dish labeled “Do not touch! For scientific purposes”. We came back up the handline and with some inspiration taken from rock climbing, we were able to wiggle ourselves back up and started making our way back. There was another path that was on the side called ‘Pigs Wallow’ that we decided to take. The name foreshadowed what was to come. Some of the spaces involved crawling through watery mud that made us look like what the name of the passage entailed. After getting muddy from head to toe and looking at some cool calcite formations, we started making our way back to the start of Resonance. Oscar made a small detour to check out the start of the GLORP, a tunnel that we read was supposed to have chest-high frigid mud and confirmed that there was indeed a large amount of mud to perhaps be wallowed through some other trip. The sight that you see after pushing through the GLORP is the ‘Wedding Cake’, a 2.5 meter stalagmite structure that resembles a wedding cake. We got back to the start of Resonance and then started making our descents. One by one we rappelled down and passed by the other group as they were making their ascent back up, in disbelief by how much mud we were covered in. We continued deeper into Resonance doing two more rappels followed by some squeezes and crawls. There was a small waterfall where we decided to turn back around and tried our best to wash ourselves of the mud. As we were reaching the end of the day and started feeling tired, Noah revived our spirits with chocolate-covered almonds. Our moods were restored and we started making our ascent back up. The walk out of Resonance felt much longer than on the way in and another session of crouch walking meant that my back started feeling achy. We exited the cave in the dark at around 10:00 pm and made our way back to camp.

For this night, the group dinner was chili served on spaghetti cooked by Ivan and Alex. To make a really flavourful chili, some of the spices should be whole and toasted prior to being ground by a mortar and pestle before seasoning. Whole cumin seeds and coriander were the ones that we toasted. Browning the beef before adding the canned diced tomatoes is another important step as it creates even more rich and savoury umami flavours in the chili. In an attempt to add more spice and flavour, we sauteed garlic and jalapeno peppers together, which I would advise against. Although the level of spiciness was perfect, the odours created by frying the jalapenos pepper made anyone around the frying pan cough from the spiciness that had gone airborne. Great flavour though! We also used two packs of spaghetti, which gave us way too much leftovers. One package can easily feed eight people. After a lengthy amount of cooking, dinner was served after 1:00 am and we gathered around a campfire.

We reflected on our day of caving, what was going to happen tomorrow, and then we went to bed before 2:00 am, opting to take it easy and sleep in the next day.

### **Day 2 – A Free Hanging Rappel Down Minigill**

We ate our late morning breakfasts and then drove a couple hours further north up the island to check out the second cave of the trip—Minigill. We geared up a little less enthusiastically than yesterday as our wetsuits were now wet and cold. The entrance this time was like a crack in the earth, splitting apart the forest revealing a 25 meter drop into the abyss below. By the time we had rigged our two ropes on trees for the rappel, the sun had started to set and rain would start to fall. Alex was among the first to rappel and unbeknownst to us, he had set up multiple headlamps at the bottom of the rappel to illuminate us for photos as we got close to the ground, as well as using a flashlight which had a bright mode that was almost blinding. So as I started my rappel down and fearfully went over the lip of the cliff and started free hanging in midair, I was soon illuminated by Alex's lighting setup, with the raindrops that whizzed past me glowing white as I got close to the ground. Meg would be the next person coming down and as she approached us on the ground Alex barked the order: "Light her up!". We followed by shining our headlamps at her for maximum illumination. I observed a surprised and terrified face knowing that is how I too felt in the spotlight just moments earlier.

After we had all gotten down, we started our adventure into the cave. There was a Tarzan rope swing that we struggled to use to get across a part of the river. We had left Noah behind and took a left into 'Fantasy Crawl', which seemed like the obvious path forward into the cave. Alex had found a body of flowing water and decided to take a trip down the lazy river swearing that it would rejoin the rest of the cave, but would actually eject him back to where the rope swing was. He quickly came back after realizing that and we went to catch up with the rest of the group that had gone deeper into Fantasy Crawl. Along the way we peered at more beautiful calcite formations until we got to the end of the crawl and regrouped with everyone else and learned that Ray had gone into a squeeze. Not knowing where the squeeze went, we sat lined up in the crawl deciding whether to follow or to stay put. I had started to stress as we were sitting there not knowing what to do and where Ray would end up. Would he get stuck? Nobody knew. We had decided to yell Ray's name on the count of three. "One. Two. Three. RAY!!!", we yelled, with no response. Hoping for the best and Ray's return, we kept sitting there and five minutes later someone at the front heard shuffling from the squeeze. A wave of relief washed over knowing that we were regrouped. Ray reemerged and said he had thought that we would follow him through. We decided to turn around as he said there wasn't anything remarkable past the squeeze. Coming back through Fantasy Crawl we

were also regrouped with Noah who thought that we were in the 'First Chamber', which was retrospectively the more obvious first choice to go through rather than go off to the side where Fantasy Crawl was. We continued into the First Chamber, where there was a sand castle village that was constructed by cavers who were there previously (we joked that many years of erosion had created these wonderful sand structures) and a looked at a collection of cave pearls; a naturally formed pool of calcite spheres that resemble pearls found within mollusks. Some more exploration was done when we took a break in a small room, where we turned off our headlamps to experience total darkness and sung some songs in unison. We concluded our symphony and started making our way back to the ropes, where we started our ascents back up. At one point some rocks came from above and landed nearby others who were setting up their ascenders. Terrifying! I was the only one in the group without a chest ascender, so the ascent up was a struggle and took a lot out of me. The ropes were unrigged and we made our way back to the cars and then back to camp. A ravioli dinner served in tomato sauce was prepared by Tristan. We gathered around the campfire for one last night, reflecting on the day and deciding what cave to do on our last day. I had printed a depiction of Plato's allegory of the cave for fun and showed it around. Someone asked what the meaning of 'Gruncle' was, as our name for the trip's group chat was 'gruncles of underground 2025'. Noah explained that it was merely a funnier sounding variation of 'uncle' and was used to differentiate this group chat from last year's. We went to bed earlier as our wake up time was 8:00 am to make it to the cave and then the ferry on time.

### **Day 3 – Getting Lost in Dreamtime and the Treacherous Voyage Back Home**

We had decided that our last cave would be 'Dreamtime', featuring a huge cavern by the previous caves' standards. We tore down our campsite and headed to the last cave, which was on a scenic forest road which even had some sprinkles of snow in the higher elevations. The entrance to the cave was a huge arch in a rock with the entrance being surprisingly small. We made our way through and after a couple rappels and crawls, we went to the giant room which was ginormous! We meandered for a bit and after Alex's camera died from getting too much sand stuck in the buttons, we started making our way back to the surface. We started looking for the exit from the big cavern when we realized that we didn't exactly know where the exit was. There was a cairn that marked a way further down but the way we remembered it was that the entrance to the large room was flat and not sloped. Some people made their way down the suspected exit until they came back and said with certainty that was not the way out. We kept searching more and more for the exit with no avail, going up and down where we thought we came from, but the truth is that everything starts to

look the same in a cave when you don't look back and make deliberate mental checkmarks of distinct features. After about 30 stressful minutes of being lost, someone had thankfully found the exit and we were on our way. The exit featured a small drop and looking back at it, was slightly obscured by more rock. We demolished another cairn that seemingly marked nothing and built a new and big one right next to the true exit back. After a couple of rope ascents and crawls, we were back on the surface and ready to go home after three long days of caving. This was the only cave that we started and finished in the daytime so reemerging to light was a pleasant change of pace from darkness.

We started our trip back to the Nanaimo ferry terminal until Noah's car got a flat tire. We'd gotten out to assess the damage and a team was assembled to put on the spare. A small jack and some wooden blocks were used to hold the Delica in place and as the wheel was taken off to put on the spare, the car slowly started to move. Everyone that was near the front leapt back as fast as they could as the car collapsed onto its front. Thankfully, nobody got trapped when it fell. We got back to getting the car back up when a couple pulled over in their truck and offered to raise it with their industrial looking jack they had in their truckbed. We gracefully accepted and were able to put on the spare. We thanked them and were off our way. However, as the Delica started to drive again, the most expensive-sounding metal grinding noise was made from where the spare tire was now. Noah thought that turning off the all-wheel drive mode would silence it, and he was right. Problem solved. Funnily enough, even with all the car troubles that we were having, we were able to make the second to last ferry home, averting a super late bedtime. We got on the ferry, asked the kitchen to reheat our surplus of spaghetti which they sadly said no to, and so resorted to Chef Mike (the microwave). We gathered around in the cafeteria to look back upon the trip and discuss, doing it in the theme of 'rose, thorn, and bud', where we shared what we thought went well, what didn't, and what they are looking forward to. Alex said that he caved and got a burger to eat instead of eating the pile of leftover spaghetti. There was a big bag of Munchies that Oscar got to try for the first time in his life. The ferry neared Horseshoe Bay and we said our goodbyes as we loaded our cars that would take us home. I was dropped off and started my reintegration into the above ground society after spending what felt like forever underground.



## Brother of Bigwall

*Nick Hindley*

*May 2025*

*Participants: Brian Cherry, Charlotte Olagnon, Clara Morin, Nick Hindley, Stefaniya Rekasius, Timmy Wong, Tristan Pinsonneault-Marrote*

**T**he Brother of Bigwall (BoB) workshop series is aimed at inducting experienced trad climbers into the big, complicated, and fatty world of climbing bigwalls. For my dear reader, I will quickly define the difference between big walls and bigwalls; a “big wall” refers to a wall that is big. Whereas a “bigwall” is a wall climbed in a style that necessitates hauling and a multi-day ascent, along with all of the faff and blue collar labour that comes with it. A route doesn’t actually have to be large to qualify - you can bigwall anything if you’re slow enough. Just the other day a party completed a multi-day ascent of the Butt Lite, as reported by the local herald ‘Squamish Rock Climbing’ Facebook group. Wild. But I digress. In broad terms, the scope of this year’s VOC workshop included: aid climbing, aid cleaning, hauling, portaedges, two-hour long belays, docking, gear love, with a garnish of fear fun. All of which culminates in a weekend team ascent of a classic Squamish aid route, Cannabis Wall (C2, 5 pitches).

Sessions 1-3 were hosted on weekday evenings in the Aviary, and lasted around three hours each. A big thank you to the Aviary gods for allowing us to use this space for our shenanigans throughout, and to Charlotte for facilitating it all. Session 1 featured an introduction to the logistics of aid and multi-day climbing objectives with discussions of grading, route selection, planning, problem solving, and me yapping about different types of aid gear for an hour. Then we migrated to the Aviary for a practical session on aid progression.

Charlotte and I had pre-installed bolt heads sticking out from the wall (à la carrot bolt) at amusing distances apart for participants to practice leading by way of marching up their aid ladders to make a reachy ‘placement’ using a



cinched nut or rivet hanger. The use of any climbing holds was strictly forbidden.

During session 2 we explored the joys of cleaning aid pitches. Sometimes sideways. And we all learned that it is hard to ascend a horizontal rope. This was a convenient segue into lower-outs and pendulums. In session 3 we looked at building functional bigwall anchors, hauling using a 1:1 system, docking and undocking the bag using a munter-mule-overhand, and bag lower-outs. While we did not have time to cover it in great detail, most people had the chance to set up the VOC portaledge from the ground.

This brings us to the main event; our practical weekend on Cannabis Wall. The plan was to operate as two independent groups of three on the route, with me zipping up and down fixed ropes to check on the groups and offer advice or heckle. Invariably, we got completely congested by pitch 2 and ended up as a massive six person group. This worked out just fine. Everyone had the opportunity to either lead pitch 1 themselves, work on hauling, or laze in the portaledge that we set up atop pitch one. I mostly opted for the latter. Charlotte put in a shift on the first C2 pitch and took the brother of big falls while transferring between consecutive bodyweight-only beak placements, high above her last good piece. Timmy managed to find an intermediary bat hook on her later attempt at the same section, which gained her another several precious inches before succumbing to the same fate with a \*PING\* of the iron hawk.

We set Brian on the task of completing pitches 2 and 3 for us. Without hesitation he quested on up. Many of the copperheads on the upper part of pitch 3 are blown out - their cables mangled and unclippable - so Brian delicately moved from one to the next by hooking the soft heads with a bird beak. Very nicely done. Sunset approached as he finished pitch 3. Rather than proceeding further with our plans to epic late into the eve, we instead collec-

**Left** Anchor hangs *Nick Hindley* **Right** Hangs on Charlotte and my homemade portaledge. *Tristan Pinsonneault-Marrote*

tively agreed that it sounded more fun to retire to my house in Squamish for a BBQ. So with the fixed lines rigged for continuation the next day, we descended in the name of burgers and beers.

Everyone camped at my house, and after a group breakfast and tall pot of coffee, we returned to the Chief lot at about 9:00 the next morning. Clara and Brian set off ahead on their commute up the fixed ropes, while others re-lead pitches or hauled. Clara racked up at the high point and led the next pitch of C1 without issue. Tristan re-led this pitch afterwards while we hauled the portaledge to station 4, taking care not to rake Tristan off his pitch with the 15 m bag lower-out. All the while, Brian pushed upwards with a 2 hour lead of pitch 5, completing our team ascent. We once again set up the portaledge and lazed as Clara cleaned the pitch. We rappelled with the haul bags, taking turns to babysit the load down the wall while I did the final de-rig at each station. The day concluded with some thorough gear fuff at my house again, where there was ice cream.

Some of my afterthoughts. All in all, this year's workshop went very well. This was the second year this course has run, and as noted last time (2022), the complexity and subjectivity of the content makes it very difficult to teach. The answer to any question is always "it depends...". However this time around I think some large improvements were made in both the delivery and receipt. Narrowing down the scope and only teaching one primary methodology for certain aspects helped - then we could later build on that during practice when we encountered a reason to do it another way. General familiarity with ropes, systems, and difficult gear placements gained through having a good amount of trad and ascending experience made all of the course content come easier. I was a bit more verbal and strict on the trad experience and ascending pre-reqs this year, which I think was the right call. For the practical day, participants need to be able to operate on their own safely and independently, since the instructor may be multiple pitches away at any time. Much of my day was spent 'housekeeping' at crowded belays, which results in a lot of transitioning personal anchors around. An obvious hazard. So ensuring that everyone can independently keep the fundamentals in front of mind amidst a complicated (sometimes chaotic) anchor system is of utmost importance. A main takeaway for me was 'talk through everything'. Either to your partner, or to yourself. If you're talking through what you're doing as you're doing it, it means you're thinking about it. This also serves to loop your partner in as a second set of eyes for safety.

A big thank you to everyone that joined this year and hung in there for the multi-week commitment. I hope to see some portaledges and Hawaiian shirts on The Sheriff's Badge this fall.

## You Don't Have to Summit to Send

*Sonia Landwehr*

*Aug. 23-25, 2025*

*Ktunaxa Nation territory (Forster Creek, Purcell Mountains, British Columbia)*

*Participants: Lucas Braun, Fiona Landwehr, Sonia Landwehr, Eric Shearer*

This summer, Lucas Braun, Eric Shearer, and I worked wilderness summer camps through the Outdoor Centre at the University of Calgary. Throughout the summer (and over many drives along Highway 1 with loud summer campers in the van) we had schemed trips, yet found most of our adventures foiled by the near constant rain we had in Calgary. Multipitches, Mt. Jumbo summits, and other climbing objectives were no-goes, and while I found some consolation in trail running, we began to feel quite antsy to go have a genuine outing. August 22 was our last day of work, and we were planning a trip to the Bugaboos immediately following, with my sister Fiona Landwehr joining us on her way back to Calgary from fighting wildfires in Smithers over the summer. However, as our continued bad water luck would have it, the Bugaboos were evacuated and closed due to flooding. The scheming began anew.

Prior to our job we all had to take a Field Leader Hiking certification course which taught us everything about Class 1 terrain (basically defined as walking on a flat trail) – arguably something we all felt more than capable in to begin with. The one thing I really felt that I took away from the course was probably quite obvious: when planning trips, make sure your group all agrees on your objective. Though readers might roll their eyes and think about how much of a no brainer that is, I realized while taking the course how often I had forgotten this crucial step to trip planning. When your group is experienced, and a trip is straightforward, it's easy to believe that you share the same objective, but this is not necessarily true. Thus, our plan was based around various

agreed-upon goals. We had liked the idea of the Bugs because some of us would be teaching the rest of us (mostly me) glacier skills, and the others could teach more rock skills in return. We debated climbing Brenta Spire, the one peak in the Bugs that wasn't part of the closure area, but figured everyone would have that exact same idea and it might be a zoo. Mine and Fiona's objectives were simply to be outside with friends after a long summer, Eric wanted to stand on a glacier for the first time in a while, and Lucas wanted to draw a line on a map and see if it went. Kidding! To my knowledge Lucas wanted to avenge a string of bails without really bagging a summit (read *To the Unclimbed Peaks* in VOCJ67 for more of his reflections). Lucas located glaciers on the map in the general vicinity of the Bugs, and drew a line that might or might not go with the help of one semi-related trip report from 2012, complete with a two-kilometre-long bushwack of unknown feasibility.

So, fresh off of my last overnight camp for the summer, feeling extremely grimy and fried, Lucas (who had worked two days that week, having been on call) walked into our staffroom with a big smile on his face and announced we would now be procuring our gear from the Outdoor Centre right then and there. I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do less, but Lucas had his sights set on a 5:00 am departure the next morning, so this would be our only chance to grab crampons and mountaineering boots.

### **August 23: The Approach**

The other three of us talked Lucas down to a 6:00 am departure, so naturally we set off at 6:30 am in Eric's Nissan Xterra. It was a beautiful drive through Banff and Radium, with plenty of burn scars and a moose sighting. We were headed to the Forster Creek Recreation Area, a popular snowmobiling spot. Our plan was as follows: bushwack and scramble to get to the North Star Glacier on Day 1; see if we could get from the North Star Glacier onto the Catamount Glacier via the Gwendoline and Scotch Col and camp around Olive Hut on Day 2; descend back to Forster Valley on Day 3. While the Catamount Glacier and Forster Valley areas get plenty of traffic, we had no real knowledge of whether we'd be able to complete the traverse from the North Star to Catamount. Eric and I were somewhat skeptical and wondered if we shouldn't just have done something that other people have actually done as well. Alas, Lucas' stoke carried us on.

After protecting the car from porcupines with chicken wire, we trekked up into the Forster Valley, at a pace I named "heat exhaustion pace." Fiona, ever strong from fire season, mercifully carried the rope for our group. We passed by a day-use hut not unlike the Red Heather shelter, taking an appreciative note of their outhouse setup, Lucas and I having spent so much time debating various outhouse solutions for the VOC. After each employing a different method for crossing an uncharacteristically deep and fast river, we

turned off the beaten path and began our bushwack. The bushwack wasn't particularly bad, but I'm not a bushwack enthusiast on any scale, so I found this pretty arduous. Lucas was speedy though and kept trying various berries and mushrooms along the way, eventually spitting out more than he could safely consume.

We hit a few rock slide debris paths which gave us two things: a nice break from bushwacking, as well as a view down into the river valley indicating that we probably should have stayed down there instead of forcing ourselves up the forested slope. Back down to the river we went. We could see why there had likely been flooding in the Bugs, the river was deep and silty from its fast pace stirring up the sediment. Though we knew we'd have to cross it, I wasn't particularly keen on fording it, as the opacity meant we'd have to keep our boots on to avoid breaking a toe on lurking unseen hazards. We paced the river bank a bit to try and find a crossing sans boot flooding, but, eventually, we just had to suck it up. A common theme of this trip would be my gratitude to Lucas and Eric for thinking of bringing poles, particularly for avoiding getting swept away by the river crossings. It was a good thing we gave in and sloshed through, as we had to cross the river many more times – perhaps the most objectively hazardous part of our journey.

We could see the moraine we had to gain up ahead of us, with the river crashing down one side of it. Not knowing whether the tarn that our map indicated would actually be there, we decided to refill our water at the river part of the way up the moraine. It was very silty water – our first encounter with glacier gunk – and filtering it through a buff unsurprisingly did very little to improve the clarity.

Not a cloud in the sky, our boots squelching with each step, we slogged on, sweaty and dirty from our bushwack in the heat. I thought it was funny that we had come to quite a remote spot to get away from civilization and yet at least every half hour we were treated to the sound of YYC-YVR flights passing overhead. We hiked pretty quietly into the alpine, lamenting the many shoulders of the moraine, each one taunting us. Having not eaten lunch, and not wanting to bonk before finding camp, we took a much needed snack break. Finally we crested the last ridge and got our first look at the North Star Glacier and peak. Aside from Stadium Glacier at Sky Pilot, I hadn't been this close to a glacier before (having somehow not attended Glacier School yet), so it was pretty breathtaking. We continued on, trying to find a spot to camp, ideally with a water source nearby. I had suggested a fairly mediocre spot close to some dirty snow, due to the relatively flat (though not very soft) surface of the ground, but Lucas pressed on a bit, determined to find the elusive tarn. Not wanting to make him do extra work for the whole group, we followed gamely along. About 100 m ahead of us, Lucas eventually stopped and called to us to come look. Ahead of him, and down a ridge, was the world's most gorgeous



**Left** Descending into paradise *Sonia Landwehr*

**Right** Our very effective bear safety. *Eric Shearer*

tarn. Bright blue, it sat sparkling in the sun. A deer (in the alpine for some reason?) drank from it on a beach that provided a beautiful soft spot for our tents, and lush plants lined the bank. What was this oasis we had stumbled onto? We picked our way down to the beach as fast as we could, reenergized at the sight of the paradise below, and immediately peeled off our soaked mountaineering boots and socks.

The tarn provided water for consumption (with only a few ice-worms...) but also allowed us a glorious swim to clean off the grime that had built up on our bodies. We were below a peak that cut off our sunlight fairly early though, so we were racing the sun into the water. Changing into camp clothes was so much more pleasant, and the state of my boots all day made me grateful for my hut booties. We each cooked varying qualities of food, Eric's soaked but very much uncooked green lentils taking the prize for least appetizing. Wanting to get an alpine start the next morning, we decided to stop fighting to stay warm in the face of some pretty frigid wind, and just go to bed early. The one thing standing in our way was securing our food for the night. Despite Lucas' best efforts, he discovered that it is impossible to buy an ursack in Calgary, with many establishments just not knowing what they are. Given we were in the alpine, there wasn't a whole lot to work with as far as trees went. We lost our minds a little bit setting up a ring of rocks around our food and toiletries, which wouldn't have stopped a mouse, let alone a bear. Eventually we rigged some sort of hang off a rock wall using one of four offset nuts Eric had brought and our rope, but it was likely more of a placebo than anything. The whole effort took us almost an hour.

The goal for tonight was to repay a bit of sleep debt we had incurred from working summer camps. Luckily, we all slept pretty soundly, despite the cold. The peak we were underneath was shedding quite a bit of rock. Though we were very safely out of the way, all four of us woke up to the sound throughout the night. Even if you know you're guaranteed to be safe, it's still an unsettling sound.

**August 24: Glacier!**

A quick breakfast (our food had survived the night) and camp pack-up later, we scrambled up the moraine again to the glacier. I got a crash course in glacier travel and we started up. It was very mellow and mostly blue ice, so we could see crevasses and moulins with no issue. We were all pretty dang psyched, and Eric's objective had been met – stand on a glacier. At some point, the angle kicked up a bit and I discovered walking uphill in crampons is not my favourite thing ever. I stopped paying attention to every single foot placement for approximately two seconds while navigating a crevassed section and put my foot through a snowbridge that covered a mini crevasse. This freaked everyone else out more than it did me, because I could see quite easily that there was a bottom about two feet down and it just felt more like postholing up to my knee than stepping into a crevasse... anyways, take this as your sign to pay close attention while strolling on a glacier.

The glacier flattened out again and we could see the rock ridge we'd have to climb over. There were a few potential lines over. This was the real limiting factor to the whole traverse, as we didn't know if we'd be able to get up to col, much less onto the Catamount Glacier on its other side. Eric, our group's ice climber, built an ice anchor and so we roped up to travel over what we assumed was a snowbridge covering a bergschrund, Eric taking the lead. The snowbridge held each of us in turn, but I'm sure our parents breathe easier knowing we roped up for it.

Having shedded crampons, Lucas assessed the pitch above us, speculating that it might be a sandbagged third class scramble. I however had no desire to scramble sandbagged third class in mountaineering boots with a heavy overnight pack on, so I volunteered to lead it roped up. I took Eric's four offsets and a few slings with me, cursing my tall pack for preventing me from tipping my head up effectively. The pitch started with a very loose gully, so we made sure the rest of the group was out of the way. This proved to be very good, as I felt a huge block shift as I passed by it. Thankfully I had placed one offset so we were connected to the rock at that point. I held the rock in place with a lot of effort while Eric scrambled to move bags out of the way at the bottom. I let the rock fall, narrowly avoiding it falling over onto my leg, and it nicely smacked the Z-lite pad on the bottom of Lucas' bag before trundling off below us. That upsetting development behind us, I continued up the wall, placing a whopping one more offset as I went. The rock above was only kind of solid, but it was a great improvement to the loose gully below. I wanted to place at least one more piece, but the rock was too loose to sling any blocks, and I was worried about what I might have to belay off of so I was hesitant to place another offset. I ended up finding a lovely solid block up at the top to sling for an anchor so it turns out I could have placed double the protection. Oh well. Lucas, Fiona,

and then Eric tied into the rope and climbed in tandem, giving each other some space for the bottom gully. Three climbers on the same top rope was a funny sight. We all agreed that the line probably went at 5.4-5.6, so I'm very grateful we roped up. Given the fragility of the rock, I'd wager this line hasn't existed for a long time, granting us a first ascent. If it was indeed a first ascent, we would like to give it the name "Tunut," named for the two nuts I placed and because we liked the word's palindromic qualities.

While Fiona and Eric finished out the pitch, Lucas scouted the other side of the col. The path forward was still a mystery but we were in need of lunch and experiencing a high that only surprise alpine climbing can bring. As we ate, we took in the view from our highpoint, which was just incredible. From here we could see our would-be objectives in the Bugaboos to the north, several mountain ranges over (and debatably, Assiniboine) to the east, and kilometres of glacier in most directions. I think the Purcells are so beautiful partly because they look kind of charred, perhaps because of black lichen growing (or dead?) over the peaks. They certainly look quite different to the Rockies in the Bow Valley we were accustomed to. Though our crux was yet to come, we were just stoked we had gotten this far – it had already been a pretty incredible trip.

Here we could tell people had actually been in this particular area before, given the garbage we started to find. Up until this point there had been no signs of human presence save for one empty helium balloon we found on the North Star Glacier – some glacier junk. Eric found some old cigars, Fiona and I found some full plastic water bottles, she picked up an oyster tin complete with leftover oyster fluids, we picked up some ski goggles and a non-matching case, and various other bits of plastic.

After refuelling and a quick bag of a little peak by Eric, we continued down the other side of the col towards the Catamount Glacier. If you know anything about me, or saw me on crutches and in a cast at the spring AGM, you'll know I've got horrifically weak ankles. My broken heel from the spring healed, I had lucked out so far on this trip, my mountaineering boots acting as a bit of a brace. However, my luck ran out and I rolled my ankle pretty good descending this ridge. I knew I'd be able to continue but Lucas insisted I hike with one of his poles for the remainder – another instance of gratitude for these poles.

We were able to get onto the Catamount Glacier fairly smoothly but the steep downhill walk was pretty tough on my ankle and with the glacier getting more icy below, I was not keen to keep at it. We debated rappelling off of a huge rock, but Lucas felt very iffy about it seeing as the rock was on the ice, no matter how melted in. So, Eric set up another beautiful ice anchor, and Fiona and I rapped. Eric and Lucas just followed on foot – it takes a lot of time to rap 70 m and we didn't feel too stoked at the idea of leaving tat. We wanted to get the heck out of there because as we were setting up the anchor we heard the biggest rock fall/avalanche event one bowl over that certainly I had ever heard.

Though we were still safely out of the way of that one, it was by far the scariest moment for most of us.

Eventually, the glacier flattened out again and we were truly just on a stroll on a glacier. I realize in the VOC there are a lot of people who have spent time on a glacier, but the novelty has not worn off for me yet. We continued along until we spotted Olive Hut high up on a moraine. The hut was booked so our plan had been to camp outside of it. Seeing it now though I felt very skeptical that there would even be space for a tent, despite the website saying there would be. From our vantage point it was little more than a rocky platform, and clambering up to it would be steep. There was a bit of a debate about what to do, which Eric mostly recused himself from, admitting he hadn't researched the second leg of our trip too much, having not expected to make it past the bushwack on Day 1. We had already been hiking for about eight hours, but it was only 1:30 pm or so. Not only would we have to exert ourselves to get up to the hut, we'd then have many hours of just sitting in a (what I assumed to be) barren space beside a hut, with little to do. So naturally, because we were tired, the obvious thing to do would be to keep pressing on until we found a better camp site (downhill from us, nonnegotiable), or covered the six remaining kilometres to the car, whichever came first.

As we walked, Lucas remarked how the best part about being on glaciers is that you can keep walking and walking but you don't seem to be making any progress, they're so huge. We were slowly nearing another moraine and saw something bright blue on its face. We pondered the possibilities and eventually figured it must be a snowmobile. Though it seemed unlikely that there would be an abandoned sled on a steep ridge, it turns out we were right; the blue thing was a tarp covering the front of it. The glacier came to an end with a beautiful swirling river and ice cave, and we did what any group does after finishing a more technical section of an objective: sat down for an hour. I guess it's a bit of an unspoken rule. We each needed a break from our still-wet boots and socks, and had to rearrange our bags to fit glacier gear back inside. I finally shed my long-johns layer, improving my temperature significantly. Fiona and I trimmed our nails, nail clippers proving to be an excellent use of weight, as the most unpleasant part of our journey was yet to come.

Back up onto a moraine we went, needing to descend about 600 m back to the valley floor, avoiding the very fast river in the process. Objectively, this descent was quite beautiful. None of us had really been in an environment quite like this, full of smooth, tan granite, vegetation and flowers becoming more lush as we descended. But it was steep, our toes were bashing the front of our boots, and my ankle was crying out for mercy. Behind me, Fiona became a little too complacent with her steps, trusting loose rocks, and I watched her shadow flailing comically about. It was seemingly endless too, our progress was extremely slow. How the heck do sledders make their way up this? (Turns out

they aren't supposed to, according to local access regulations.) We had our eyes on a green patch below us, right beside the river, still about 100 m above the valley floor. However, we were worried that the brown patch on one side that looked suspiciously like a bog would be either too mushy or not flat enough to camp on. With about 100 m of elevation until the potential camp, I had lost all motivation, not entirely sure that I'd be able to get to the valley floor if the site was indeed a bog. Eric said that we were in luck either way though, because when we got there it would either be a great campsite, or it would be kind of funny. This reframing only kind of helped me.

Wonder of wonders however, the grassy patch was indeed a bog, but not too wet to foil our camping plans. Having all gone nonverbal in the final stretch toward camp, we silently set up our tents and rounded up our cooking supplies. We were next to a waterfall, and it was clear no one particularly felt like raising their voices to be heard by one another. With food in us though we came alive again. I felt very thankful in that moment; thankful that we had met Eric through work, thankful that Fiona could come meet the Calgary troupe, thankful that Lucas had planned such a cool trip, and thankful that Eric didn't complain when we talked about the VOC for hours on end. We rigged a much better bear hang this time, having a mini cliff with a few trees in the subalpine. We drank in the view, able to enjoy it now that we weren't slogging. We did not watch the sunset, because we were very tired, and around 7:30 pm we retired to our tents already. Not convinced I would be able to fall asleep with the sun still so high, Fiona and I stayed up until around 8:30 pm, reading out the blurbs on her Invasive Species of Alberta playing cards. Despite the light, we fell asleep with zero problem, the waterfall beside us providing us with white noise.

### **August 25: Sleeping in**

I woke up a few times in the morning, starting around 7:00 am. Fiona was still dead to the world with her earplugs in, and I couldn't hear Lucas or Eric stirring in their tent. I snoozed a few alarms and Fiona and I got up around 9:00 am with the heat, having slept around 12 hours. Lucas had claimed the previous afternoon that he never sleeps in. I, as someone well acquainted with the sufferfest that is a VOC Presidential September, however, told him to come talk to me in October. He went to bed the night before saying he expected to wake up naturally with the sunlight. Lucas slept for a whopping 14 hours. In fact, I had to go wake him and Eric up, and he asked if it actually was 9:30 am when I rustled their tent. It was. Hah.

The waterfall had let up a little overnight with the cooler temps, and the river looked maybe crossable early enough in the day. This would have given us a mellower final descent. However, I think we probably slept too long because by the time we were on our way again, the river was back to looking uninviting. Oh well. Back to our slog, this time a bit steeper still. I rolled my ankle again, Lucas awkwardly slid down a slippery rock, and Fiona buttjammed a crack in the granite to avoid that same fate. Eric seemed happy enough, taking some nice photos as he followed us. All good and bad things must come to an

## VOCJ68

end though, and finally we were on the valley floor. Flat ground had never felt so good. The same went for finally dry boots, even though we promptly had to flood them a few more times. Then, the pièce de résistance: another bushwack. This time through a swamp! We groaned as Lucas giggled his way through. I did not envy Fiona for her wearing shorts.

Out of the bushes, we stopped beside the river one last time to rinse off the bushwack residue and say hi to some little frogs. We regained the trail and from there it was an easy ~2 kilometres to the car. The porcupines had left Eric's car alone and we made our way back to Calgary, with a mandatory stop at Screamers in Radium for ice cream (the screamers machine was broken).

Thank you to Lucas for planning this spectacular trip, and to him and Eric for going over glacier stuff for me. Thanks to Fiona for carrying the rope the entire trip, I made zero moves to even pretend to offer to carry it. We also acknowledge with respect and gratitude, recreation on the traditional lands of the Ktunaxa Nation. This trip was cool because there was no summit involved, but we sent anyway. Even if the traverse hadn't went in its totality, we would have each achieved our objectives. Lucas drew a line on a map, and more than just some of it went. Eric stood on a glacier. Fiona and I got to be outside with friends. I guess my real and unironic takeaway from this trip was that maybe the send was the friends we made along the way. What more could you want?

**Photo** The crew



# SKIING AND WINTER MOUNTAINEERING



## North Joffre Creek Boomerang

*Julian Larsen*

*February 15th -17th, 2025*

*Duffy Lake Road, BC*

*Participants: Julian Larsen, Erik Reimers, Leon Chen, Stefanija Rekasius, Sri Chaitanya, Nadia Tarazi, Harrison Crerar*

**A**t the beginning of 2025, I moved to Squamish for an 8-month co-op placement. While this brings many benefits, it means I couldn't join any of the extensive reading week trips my friends had planned. Instead, I would have to make do with a regular long weekend. So, with Family Day long weekend on the horizon and no concrete plans, I messaged Erik Reimers to propose a ski traverse. He told me he was signed up for a VOC trip doing the North Joffre Creek Horseshoe traverse, and I should throw my name in as well. Since the stats seemed relatively mild, we planned on bagging some extra peaks and skiing some additional lines if the conditions were good.

### **DAY 1:**

On Saturday morning, we set off. The seven of us began cruising down the logging road that begins the path of our traverse. We quickly branched off into tight, small trees that avoided the marsh in the center of the valley. These trees posed rather complicated skinning, with many steep drops and skinny snow bridges. The tight trees blessed us with piles of snow to fill our jackets, pants, and boots, as we inadvertently knocked their branches. While only a very short section, this first bottleneck slowed the group significantly.

**Section cover** Helena Sverak

Once out in the open, we realized the marsh was very skinnable and much smoother to travel. We followed it for a bit before bearing off into the trees and up the mountain slope. After some tough skinning on sugary snow, Erik realized we probably should've followed the valley longer, but the path was still a viable way. As it steepened, skins became useless, and the only way to make uphill progress was to pull on Alder branches and drag our bodies up the slope. I did a couple of "dynos" between branches and remarked that I didn't expect this to be a climbing trip. Eventually, the skin track ended and cut sharply back towards the valley, where we could see a different group easily skinning up the open slope. Clearly, whoever set this track got frustrated enough to quit and go home. This section was a much greater bottleneck than the first, and Erik, Stefanija, and I became worried as we saw no sign of the rest of the group for several minutes. Luckily, nothing had gone wrong, so we decided to also cut down to the valley once the others began catching up.

Between us and the open slopes stood another barrier many a VOCer may battle with: alder. Realizing the skin track we were following was unreliable, Erik forged his own path through the alders and made it to the open slope. From there, we watched as one at a time people became "stuck in alder jail," as Erik put it. We waited a long while and nervously checked the time. We had not made it very far from the car, and it was already the afternoon. One by one, everyone made it out of jail, but not unscathed. Harrison's relatively new frame binding had snapped, and no amount of backcountry repair was going to salvage it. Erik, being the fastest among us, decided he would shuttle Harrison to Whistler and then skin up alone to meet us at camp. Given the late time, we decided on a much earlier camp at a lake below Cassiope. It was quite smooth skinning to the camp, and we dug out holes for tents and an area for cooking. Snow was falling around us, and visibility was poor. Before we had even finished dinner, Erik arrived out of the dark as the hero of the day (and as we will see, every day).

## **DAY 2:**

We awoke to even worse visibility, and after warming up with breakfast, headed out for a decently big day, trying to make up for our lack of progress the day before. Quickly after crossing the lake, the slope steepens, and Stefanija's skins stopped sticking to her skis. Unfortunately, no amount of cleaning helped, and ski straps were used as a last resort. By the time we made it to the pass between Cassiope and Saxifrage, we were all in relatively good spirits. We weren't making the best time, and the visibility was horrendous, but we were on track to make it to camp 2 on the Place glacier that day.

We transitioned to ski mode, and Leon led the way down the steep glacier below Saxifrage. It was decent skiing conditions, but the light was so flat and the visibility so poor that it was nearly impossible to see where we



### *Top to bottom*

**1** Booting back up the glacier  
*Sri Chaitanya*

**2** Leon's shovel shoes  
*Julian Larsen*

### *Below*

Stefanija making her way  
through the alder-bash near  
the start

*Erik Reimers*

were going. Leon crashed in front of me, and I skied over to him to see if he was okay. He said his ski had pre-released and went sliding down below him. No biggie, I thought, I'll just do a couple more turns and grab it for him. As I did this, I realized he was right above a series of large cliffs that I couldn't make out before due to the bad visibility. My optimism began to sink; this wasn't looking so good. I contoured the cliffs and found no sign of Leon's ski. The visibility was so poor, in fact, that I couldn't even tell if I was moving or not at times, so it's no surprise I couldn't make out the faint track of a lone ski. I followed the slope further before noticing that it funneled into a large open valley. I made a checklist of hurdles in my mind: deep snow, poor visibility, huge search area, and a white ski - we are doomed. Erik and I started zig-zagging through the valley searching, and others joined as they arrived. Erik booted back up to the cliffs to see if he could find any signs of the lost ski, but he found nothing. Leon had very quickly accepted the fact that he was hiking out. With shovels fastened to his boots as makeshift snowshoes, he started slogging his way back to our previous camp. The glacier was too steep to skin, so we all started booting up the long slope with our skis on our backs. Erik, always the hero, led the way with 3 skis on his back (Leon's ski as well as his). The snow was horrendous for bootpacking: deep, dry, and sugary. At one point, I slid down until my boots were skidding on a rock slab at the bottom of the snowpack. Swimming technique was needed to get past some short cruxes. Once the slope was suitable for skinning, Erik dug out a bench, and we sat waiting for the rest of the group to arrive. Erik, feeling fit and heroic again, dropped his pack and went partway down to carry Sri's up for him.

After skinning to the ridge, we transitioned to downhill mode only to unveil

a new gear issue to add to the pile. Stefanija fell to the very back, which was somewhat unusual. Her boots would not change to ski mode, so she was flailing her way down in walk mode instead. From the ridge, the highway was in sight. I tried to convince anyone to ski all the way to the car and drive back so we wouldn't have to set up camp again, but by the time people arrived at the lake, it was dark, and nobody seemed stoked enough to join. I re-dug the hole for our tarp-tent and set everything back up in the same place. Another failed day.

**DAY 3:**

It was a cold, slow morning. During the night, I had been jolted awake multiple times by loud popping. Erik arose to find that several baffles on his sleeping pad had burst. The weather decided to give us a bluebird day right when we didn't need it. Leon, in a completely unrelated issue to having lost his ski, couldn't get his boots on. It was so bad, in fact, that in trying to force it on, the shell cracked. Leon decided to walk down in only his liners (strapped onto shovel blades, of course). Once we made it into the valley, Erik and I broke ahead. At the beginning of the alders, we started transitioning. Erik turned the first corner, and then moments later, I started following, but my skin snagged on a branch and tore at the tip. I decided I would try going in ski mode, as it was mostly downhill. There were several forks in the skin track, and I opted for the more downhill one each time since I had no skins on. Eventually, this deposited me in a creekbed at the bottom, where the tracks fizzled out and climbed back up. Absolutely defeated, I decided I would go back to skinning, but with only one skin on. With great effort on the short uphill, I gradually made my way towards the highway, kicking with my one skin and gliding with the other ski. I passed Erik, who had dropped his pack at the car, and backtracked to grab Leon's pack for him. Awkwardly scooting, I eventually cruised into the parking lot. Another gear failure for the list. Erik somehow arrived at the car second, which made me worried something had gone awry, but the rest of the crew came not too long after.

All in all, we spent 3 days and nearly (but not quite) made it to our intended day one camp. Harrison's binding snapped, Leon's ski was lost, and his boot stopped opening, Stefanija's skins didn't stick, and her boots didn't go into ski mode, Erik's pad exploded, and one of my skins tore. Everybody made it out relatively unscathed, although Leon's toes probably took a beating. I've bailed on a number of things, but as far as failures go, this was pretty colossal. Hopefully, we all learned a bit about how to prevent something like this from recurring.

## The Brew Debacle of 2025

*Sunny Das*

*November 22- 23 2025*

*Stephanie Grothe Hut (Brew Hut)*

*Participants: Katie Sattler, Sean Dempsey, Amelia Thorpe, Samu Vaccari,  
Simon Tsianikas, Adrian Kirchner, and Sunny Das*

The Brew Debacle of 2025 Poem  
Initiated by trip leader Katie Sattler  
Written by all  
We rise at 5 am.  
Meet at Timothy Hortons  
Old man told us the chair was reserved  
Next the skies opened  
And rain was served  
We depart from the trailhead, enthusiasm preserved  
Caltopo track lines lookin hella curved  
Amelia came in clutch with the shuttle,  
We strap our skis to our bags in a puddle;  
Under the trees we eat candy and huddle  
A debacle was brewing,  
We were feeling muddled  
We saw two hunters -  
Lucas' double  
It was 2 pm and we hit the transition  
It seems the gods of debacle have listened  
Up we climb as the rain keeps pissin'  
The final push, Sam is missing  
Light is fading so  
We must hustle

We charge up the hill  
Using all of our muscle  
We get to the hut and Catherine's not here  
We all sit and cheer  
Then Sunny disappears  
But never fear,  
This is not the end of our debacle career  
We'll be back next year  
(To eat nuts and fish)

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The Brew Debacle of 2025 Trip Report  
Initiated and mainly written by Sunny Das.  
Sprinkles, snippets, and edits from all trip participants

### Introduction

A debacle was brewing.

The weather looked formidable. We roped in a German pal who was visiting Vancouver for just one week and wanted an adventure. Some bailed a few days before.

Brew Debacle has a long history in the VOC. My first backcountry ski trip experience was at Brew Debacle last year, which ended up being at Red Heather due to avalanche conditions. I remember Lucas Braun, who has led the Debacle before, telling us keen skiers: "Legend has it, you don't go looking for the debacle. The debacle finds you." This year, our trip leader, Katie Sattler, taking input from President Lucas, (wisely) decided to keep it an AST-only event. Some may think this limited our debacle, but I can gladly report that I felt sufficiently de-bacled. Tradition lives on. And, as the only participant using club skis that weekend, I can safely say to beginners that Katie did you a huge favour and you can thank her later.

We started off at Tim Hortons in the morning. It was pissing rain, as predicted. Realizing we did not have anything to protect our ski boots, we had to take a quick stop at Walmart on the way to acquire garbage bags.

So, our start was a bit late, and we got to the trailhead at about 10 am. The incredibly-wet-but-still-joyful debacl-ers included Katie, Sean Dempsey, Amelia Thorpe, Samu Vaccari, Simon Tsianikas, Adrian Kirchner, and myself. We assembled our A-frames, stashed our boots in the bags, did some jumping jacks in the rain, and headed off on our way at 10:30 am.

Hanging over all of our heads as we slogged up the FSR, in addition to clouds and a dark sky, was Catherine. Catherine had booked Brew Hut out that weekend for 17 people and had not responded to Katie's various emails warning her about Brew Debacle. She had a no fish or nuts policy, which we each had



kept in mind when planning our meals. Needless to say, none of us particularly relished the idea of sharing the hut with Catherine and 17 other people. We carried this looming threat of a full, wet, squishy hut with us as we made our journey up.

The FSR passed us by with a surprise encounter from Lewis, a hunter dude who Katie thought looked exactly like Lucas. Somehow, Lucas' spirit was there with us on the trail as the unofficial Brew Debacle guru. Katie surprised Lewis by asking them for a photo, which we will include here. Do you think it looks like Lucas?

Right around this moment, we made a fateful flaw in calculation . Samu decided it would be a good idea to stand on a log in the middle of a creek for reasons, and he fell knees-first into the creek and landed on a rock. At the time, I thought nothing of it, but I guess he was in more pain than he seemed to be in (read on).

#### **Adrian's pov**

Right after the FSR ended, we forded the first few hundred meters of make-shift creeks the weather had graciously donated to our trail to make this even more of an adventure. It kept not only the rest of our body, but also our shoes well-hydrated.

**Photo** *Adrian Kirchner*

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We continued on, and soon stopped for a lunch break. The rain was relentless. Eventually, at ~2 pm, we reached snow. It hadn't been so bad up until that point. The hut seemed to be pretty close, and we only had maybe 30% of the trail left to do. Samu transitioned to skis pretty quick and was off ahead, but most of us stayed in our hiking boots as we stomped through the snow.

Suddenly, I became very cold, like an icy blanket was thrown around me. The rain was thoroughly soaked through my shell, leaving my skin damp. My toes were beginning to freeze. I stopped to put on all my layers, got out my avalanche gear, and then continued on. But, I was shivering and so every step was a struggle. The rain kept falling. Branches and uneven terrain made my passing difficult and I wondered how it could have become so much tougher so quickly. Increasingly frustrated, A-frame getting caught on the low hanging trees and branches, I tried to make progress. It was humbling, also because I was the only one who seemed to be so affected by the cold.

"Sunny, you are so metal." Katie reminded me. I did not feel very metal.

After crossing some more creeks and seeing Sean and Simon transition, I decided it was time. In the pouring rain, I took off my pack and decided to switch socks. My ski boots were a relief compared to my soaked hiking boots.

Where was Samu? Adrian came back, having forged ahead (he was the only one in snowshoes, so had fared a lot better in this section). He couldn't find Samu, (whom he tried to find looking for an avalanche check). We decided to follow his tracks and try catching up to him.

We ended up following his tracks all the way to the hut, over the course of a couple of hours of wondering what was up. Again, not to overemphasize, but it kept pouring this entire time. My layers soaked to the bone and I was quite cold. I had just been to Harrison the week before, so this couldn't be that bad in comparison, but somehow it was. One ski in front of the other, we skinned up, facing lower and lower visibility. At certain points, it was almost a complete white-out. Katie maintained group spirits, while I mostly played the role of complainer and suffer-er.

### Adrian's pov

There were two obstacles, before we could make it to the final ascent to the hut and then around the small tree-lined ridge. First: a snowed-over creek just too wide to comfortably skin over. Amelia was the only one who managed to cross elegantly while everybody else struggled with the snowed-over banks (yeah, it had finally started to snow and not piss anymore!!). After we cleared that obstacle, we made our way through a basin home to a lake – a lake that did not show up on the small map of Samu's Garmin it turns out, which made him skin by dangerously close. Luckily, we made it up without anyone taking a poten-

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tially detrimental ice-cold dip thanks to Katie's situational awareness and her diligent map-work. Just before the final ridge, we whipped out the headlamps, ate a bunch of Amelia's trail mix (which we brought, forgetting about Catherine's request) and skinned up the final meters to the hut.

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I stared and barely made out an oddly rectangular looking rock that was a slightly different shade than the rest of the clouded grey sky and decided it was the hut. "Land ho" I exclaimed, but in the form of "There's the hut!" Sean and Katie didn't believe me, still thinking it was a rock. No trust they had in me it seemed.

But it was in fact the hut (though the last twenty minutes still did me in). The rain became snow that pelted its bullets against my face as I trekked up the last hill, (taking a sufficient number of breaks). I was so done with this, I just wanted to be inside.

Eventually, we got to the door. I would like to congratulate Katie for making it to the hut. Here, we jubilantly discovered that Catherine and crew were in fact not there!

The others shook off snow, stripped off gear, gathered around the table in the hut, and got cozy. I was very cold. I headed straight upstairs and crawled into my sleeping bag, stripped off my wet clothes, and waited to warm up. I was shivering. Violently. I didn't realize how cold I had been until now. I huddled up trying to conserve my heat, but still continued to shiver. At one point, I was close to tears (I think I shed a few). At any rate, it was not a good time. I reflected on Lucas' words: "You don't look for the debacle, the debacle finds you". Or really, I guess he meant the cold. I might have been on my way to mild hypothermia, or just extreme shivering. But thankfully, 3 hot water bottles, an extra sleeping bag, a bivy, a few reeses, and a healthy twenty minutes later, I was ok to go downstairs.

I learned there had been a hut construction process in the meantime. A gingerbread brew was a-making, while a fire was burning and food was a-cooking. Some strums on the guitar had been had prior to my arrival. Not a bad vibe.

Our evening at the hut made up for the dreary day. We wrote a poem, roasted cinnamon buns, ate the gingerbread house, recounted old VOC stories, played Go-fish (to annoy Catherine) and generally did what people do in huts late at night – laughed a lot, cleaned a bit, and went to bed.

The next day, we were greeted with clearer skies and a great view. We decided to take our first turns of the season and headed down some ripe and crusty snow. Sean fell once and his hand began to bleed (remember to wear gloves, folks). Simon also fell once. "I think this is the worst skiing conditions I have ever been in" Simon said. It was pretty shit. But the view was great and it



**Left** *Sunny Das*

*Top to bottom*

- 1** *Sunny Das*
- 2** *Simon Tsianikas*

wasn't raining, so it couldn't have been that bad. We went back to the hut to get organized.

### **Sean's pov**

Never before had I considered gloves to be a piece of safety equipment. I chose not to wear them because they were soaked from the torrential slush the night before. It turns out that ice is hard and sharp. My hand swelled up a bit the next day and it was a bit tricky to take notes.

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Adrian and Samu started down earlier, since we thought the snow-shoer might take longer. At 11 am., the rest of us started heading down. Immediately passing the terrain we had covered earlier in the morning, we discovered it had become much harder. I found it incredibly difficult to turn my skis at all, as there was no forgiveness from the "snow" and I quickly lost confidence in my skiing abilities. "Maybe you should just straight gun it down this section to gain momentum for the uphill," Katie suggested as I stopped before a downhill of questionable quality.



I gunned it. I picked up speed and I could no longer stop myself. The tracks in the snow were dangerous pitfalls, with pumps and potholes to scrape across as my momentum indeed carried me down very, very fast. Maybe my skis were a bit out of control. I half-screamed, knowing I hit a point of no return... and then I fell. It wasn't a crazy fall, just a hint of a twist in the knee, and it was totally recoverable. But, it rattled me. My nerves were shot and I struggled to get back up, wondering, how do I fucking ski down this entire thing?

It is one thing to suffer on a debacle and it is another thing to be disproportionately impacted by the debacle. This is how I felt, having been gifted freezing toes, shivering conditions, bad skiing abilities (my fault?), and club skis. An uphill awaited me after the fall, and I tried doing it with my skis on but quickly became too frustrated. I cursed under my breath. I took my skis off and trudged up the hill.

The others were waiting at the top, and were deliberating about the trees we would have to go through. Skis soon went back on. They each then went down, skating on the "snow," and I took one look and shook my head. Skis back off. I walked.

Katie Sattler, bless her soul, waited for me. As I tried to put my skis back on, I realized the frame bindings somehow did not fit my foot anymore. Screwdriver. Twists. I was not feeling good about these skis. Eventually, finally, we got the right adjustment. I cautiously went on, holding my breath as if that would ward off the potential fall.

Reading this trip report, maybe you think I am being dramatic with how I am telling this part of the story because "it wasn't that bad." You're right, it wasn't, there's been worse, but I felt quite sorry for myself as I plopped down 5 meters later anyways. I declared that I needed a snack break, and texted Lucas one line: "I am the entire debacle," remembering his words from last year's pre-trip, and using humour as a bandaid (mostly for my pride). I was wrong about that, but at the time, it felt right.

At this point, it became clear that we would not catch up to Adrian and Samu. (Adrian later imputed that he ran down half the snowshoe trail just to make sure that the group would not have to wait for him. R.I.P. his effort there.) Amelia and Katie took some of my excess supplies, so my pack was pretty light. The best we could do was continue on, at whatever speed I could. It was slow progress, and I would be embarrassed if any video footage of my struggle were to circulate. In theory, it shouldn't have been as bad as it was – I've skied in bad conditions before, no? – but I was not having it. Maybe it was because it was the first ski of the season, or the club skis, or the terrain, or just me, but it was slow. Luckily, the others were patient and once again, Katie maintained the group's spirits, while I mostly played the role of complainer and sufferer. "Remember, you are metal," Katie said. I tried.

At some point, we got down far enough to A-frame. Sean and Simon

were a bit behind us girls.

### **Sean pov**

The skiing got near impossible as we approached Brew Lake. After one section where we had to carry our skis up and through some trees, I decided I wanted to try putting my skins on. The terrain had flattened at this point, and the main obstacle to skiing was going too fast and hitting trees and the copious amount of creeks. Amelia, Katie, and Sunny continued carrying their skis past me, but Simon stayed behind and also put his skins on. I went ahead, navigating over some bare earth and trees. I looked back and noticed that Simon had taken a different route and was well higher than me on the hill. I kept moving forward. Then, I heard some weird sounds behind me, spun around, and saw Simon on his back, head down the hill. There was a moment of confusion as to what had just happened. To me it looked like his entire binding had fallen off, but it quickly became clear the binding had actually snapped in half . . .

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They caught us as we were transitioning, and we learned that Simon's binding had completely broken. Apparently, the debacle had found Simon (poor guy). Not great for the bills.

But, Simon with a smile (pictured above) kept walking, and so we all followed suit. Getting to dry land felt like a miracle, except for the wet hiking boots we had to put on. From there on, it was smooth sailing. The packs weighed a bunch – except mine because everyone had taken my stuff – but we managed to make it down the trail and onto the FSR in decent time.

### **Adrian's pov**

Around the same time, Samu and I had made it to the car. Samu was, as the others will find out later, not in his best shape (well, at least his knee, which was about 150% of its usual size). After getting back onto the FSR, we took a snack break and considered stashing our gear and hiking up again to help the others haul their gear over the more tricky sections. This was a thought we played with for a long time. We also tried to help the others out in the snowy section by pre-compacting the snow and advising them to take a slightly different route that Samu skinned up in white-out conditions.

Turns out: with visibility it is actually much easier to find a decent path to negotiate all the trees, rocks and contours of the terrain. We sadly did not manage to get through to the others, reading this report, it becomes abundantly clear that they were not in a state where there was room for optimization, instead it required focus and stamina to keep going. After the aforementioned snack-break, Samu's movements were a less smooth on the FSR. Turns out Ski-Boot Hiking is not super fun, especially if your knee is plus-sized. He still pushed on and made it to the car about 2h earlier than the rest of the debacle-suffering

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crew. I, being bored, decided to shed some weight and hike up again, getting reports about the progress of the rest of the team both from oncoming hikers but also Whatsapp live location. Turns out, data up there is surprisingly good, often better than in some parts of Germany. This made communication a lot easier given the group was stretched out like chewing gum over 6 or 7 km.

Well, we all made it down eventually (just before needing headlamps again). Samu, in the meantime, had cooled his knee in the stream and sheltered in Amelia's car (whose keys she had wisely stashed). We packed up, and Amelia shuttled us down.

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Back at the car, we learned Samu had been debacle-ed the hardest. His leg was hurting a shit-ton and he wondered if there was serious damage. He would go to the ER the next morning. It would turn out to be fine. Still, getting past my own mishaps this trip was humbling in comparison to Samu's feat of getting up and down to Brew with a swollen knee and a lot of pain. Some people really are metal.

### Concluding Thoughts

So, how do I feel about Brew Debacle? In some ways, I was miserable for a sizeable portion of it. But, in other ways, it was worth it for the very reason that it was the Brew Debacle. Brew Debacle is supposed to mess with you. There is a sort of poetic justice to it. Sometimes, type-2 fun comes in for the win. In hindsight, I embrace my spot as the debacle-ed 'beginner' of Brew Debacle (2025 version).

We went to the samosa place on the way back and upon leaving, Samu initiated a round of hugs. With warm hearts and tired eyes, we hopped in cars back to Vancouver and drove home.

(This experience also pushed me to scour Facebook Marketplace for the next three weeks to find AT skis, which I happily used at Phelix New Years, with a much better result. And better weather. A debacle's job well-done.)  
Till next year, Brew Debacle.

# Winter Ascent of Stuart Peak Northeast Couloir

*Nick Hindley*

*18 -19 January, 2025*

*Participants: Evan Beatty, Nick Hindley*

**W**inter ascent of two routes in the Cheam Range; the Northeast Couloir of Stewart Peak and the South Ridge of Baby Munday. Good access via logging roads then avalanche slopes leading south from Wahleach Lk.

We drove up to Wahleach Lake late on Friday night, stopping to camp at around 850 m elevation on a high spur of the Jones Lakeshore Branch, which would provide the most direct winter access to the north faces of the Cheam Range. Skis on from the truck, we set off at a leisurely 8:30 am under crisp, clear skies. The packs were heavy; loaded with bivy gear, ropes, ice tools, a mixed climbing rack, and freshly sharpened crampons. Over-sharpened, as I would imminently discover. Some quick first aid was required not even ten minutes from the car as I sliced my knuckle open while cinching up a strap on my pack. Within an hour we were crashing into the forest at the end of the logging road, and another hour to reach the firm avalanche runnels leading up to the base of Stewart Peak's NE Couloir.

We roped up to start climbing at 1:45 pm. Evan Beatty took the first lead through soft snow, then mixed firm snow and ice. We swung leads four times as we simul-climbed the 600m couloir - placing cams, ice screws, and pickets along the way. During the third block, Evan grew fed-up with snow wallowing and instead quested up an alternate gully, which turned out to be a dead-end. He slung the rope around a convenient ice column and rapped back down to quickly get us back on track. It was slow going, and the sunset snuck up on us as we were maybe half way up the couloir, around 5:30 pm Thus began my final block, marching up the never-ending, firm  $\sim 55^\circ$  snow slope under moonlight and the narrow beam of my headlamp. It must have been about



8:30 pm by the time we crested the top of the slope. We got to work melting snow for water and digging a cave into a nearby snowdrift.

In the name of fast-and-light, we brought only one 110 g fuel canister on this trip, which yielded a grand total of about five litres of warm water that evening before feebly sputtering out. If warmed in the jacket first, there may have been a small reserve of fuel left to be extracted, but we didn't end up using it. We tucked into the snow cave for the night around 10:30 pm.

The next morning we skipped out on the warm breakfast and coffee. The rationed 1-litre of water for the day was continuously subsidized with snow. Wind and spindrifts began to pick up as we packed up the bivy and discussed our options for the day. Around 8:30 am we set off up the final slopes of Stewart Pk to tag the summit. Back down and setting off once again by 9:45 am, towards Baby Munday. We traversed over an incredibly windy saddle north of the peak, then booted down to the west side of the mountain. We stashed packs here and set off to the south ridge with only climbing gear. Moving unencumbered was a relief.

Temps sat around  $-12^{\circ}\text{C}$  with a strong, cold easterly wind, from which the ridgeline offered no shelter. Again we simul-ed 40 m apart through four long pitches of firm snow and a couple brief sections of steeper ice or rock. Exclusively cams or nuts with long runners were used for protection, though the options for pro were quite sparse. Crampons scraped on bare rock for a couple of exposed moves around the corner, then leading to a short pitch of ~low-5th



**Above**  
Sunrise on Baby Munday,  
from our snow cave bivy

**Left**  
Evan enjoying the views

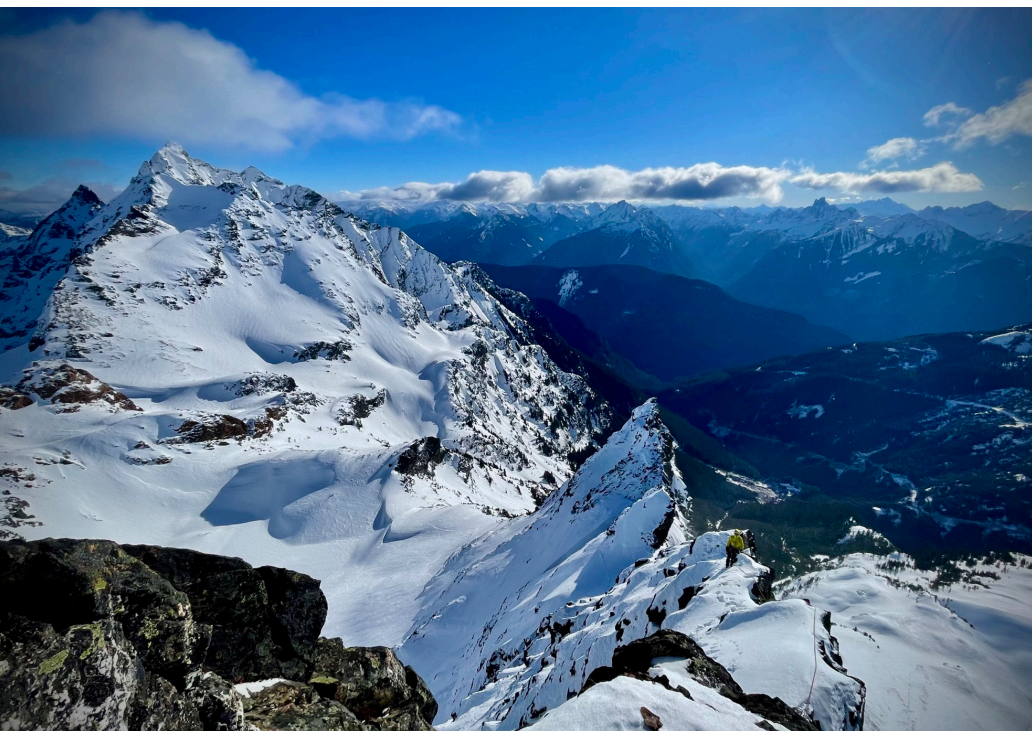
**Right**  
Evan follows along the  
crest of the S Ridge

*Nick Hindley*

rock and snow up the final 30 m to the summit.

We snapped a few photos, then a 55 m rappel off the summit block and down to the steep snow slopes below. We hoped to descend the route by traversing lower across the face, in order to avoid down climbing the section of steeper ice. However a slight miscalculation placed us directly over top of the ice section once we regained our previous track up. We booted up a bit and built a second rap anchor; a sling equalized off of a directional horn and an okay nut.

Once back at our packs, we skied out via the unnamed glacier between Stewart Pk and Knight Pk. A quick skirt around the cornice led into a short, steep entry to the glacier. The 400 m descent down the glacier yielded some surprisingly excellent skiing, considering the snow conditions we had encountered everywhere else that weekend. We traversed northeast back to our original uptrack as we descended. A short bootpack through the alders led us to a familiar crash through the forest, and eventually back to the logging road. We arrived back at the truck by 6:30 pm.



# Pyroclastic Peak Northwest Face Day Trip

*Nick Hindley*

*26 January, 2025*

*Participants: Nick Hindley, Seamus Boyd-Porter*

## **6:30 am**

**W**e were able to drive about 2 km up Brandywine FSR (~550 m elevation) before being halted by a decisive snow berm that marked the start of the groomed 'sledders highway'. Powder Mountain Snowmobile Club grooms this road for sled access in the winter. Skinning up was easy going for the next four hours; the corduroyed snowmobile highway led straight up to the alpine at 1,850 m.

## **10:15 am**

Over the course of yet another four hours, we bee-lined it to the base of Pyroclastic Peak. We traversed around the south side of Flipper Peak, which was steep and icy with very limited snow cover, forcing us to lose about 100 m in elevation. (On the return, we contoured high around the north side of the feature, which I'd recommend.) Continued towards Cayley, then steep skinning up to the Cayley-Pyroclastic Col



### **Left**

First good views of Pyroclastic Pk, NE side

### *Next page* **Left**

Seamus preparing to descend the NW face

### **Right**

Booting up the face

*Nick Hindley*

### 2:15 pm

Here we stashed skis and continued on foot through variable snow conditions towards the NW face of Pyroclastic. Most of the face consists of steep boot packing and tool-plunging, but we encountered a short section of proper ice and front pointing about 1/3 of the way up the face. The route was comfortably protectable with just three pickets.

### 3:30 pm

The NW face crests the ridgeline about 40 m below the summit. Loose snow and crampon scratching on rock leads the final 15 m to the summit. I left a sling and fed my rope through it for a bit of protection while downclimbing this section - though I didn't especially want to take a proper fall onto whatever choss horn I had slung.

### 5:00 pm

We downclimbed the route as the sun set. Some fun steep skiing down from the col by headlamp under a clear, moonless sky. We reached the top of the groomed track again by 8:00 pm. A fast and fun ski out had us back at the truck just before 9:00 pm. In the end, the day was 15 hours car-to-car, about 2700 m elevation, and ~35 km distance.



## Reflections on Ecopointing Kulshan

*Helena Sverak*

*June 7th - June 9th, 2025*

*North Cascades/ Kulshan*

*Helena Sverak, Corey Monteith, Vivan Liu, Nico Petch*

**S**elf-propelled travel, defined as reaching your destination under your own power, is a core tenet of the VOC. Whether by wheels, paddles, or your own two feet, it invites you to slow down, engage with the land, and experience the journey as much as the destination.

For me, it started more simply: I didn't have a car. However, over the past year, it has grown into something deeper. As I began to consider training for endurance bike racing this spring, self-powered trips became a way to log big rides while still spending weekends skiing and exploring the Coastal Mountains. More recently, as my objectives got more ambitious, I've come to value the deep satisfaction of leaving from my front door and arriving somewhere remote and wild, entirely under my own power. In a world wired for instant gratification, there's something incredibly grounding about approaching a summit step by step, one pedal after another, over hours or days of effort. The view back down, over everything you crossed to get there, comes with a sense of tangible accomplishment that's hard to find elsewhere.

It's a feeling that still amazes me. Growing up in the prairies of Minnesota, alpine landscapes felt like a distant dream, accessible only by 16-hour drives or by flights. To now be able to reach true wilderness with nothing but my legs and a bit of stubbornness is a gift I don't take lightly.

Each season, I try to choose a goal; something to anchor my time outdoors so I don't get swept up in grad school and let the weekends slip by. A self-propelled summit of Kulshan (Mt. Baker) appeared to be a perfect objective, with some excellent VOC trip reports for inspiration – a challenging yet

accessible bike ride culminating in the volcanic summit of the most prominent peak visible from Vancouver. It felt like a fitting conclusion to my first season of glaciated travel. For our trip to Kulshan, Vivian Liu, Corey Monteith, Nico Petch and I biked 300 km with 2,700 m of elevation gain burning around 8,000 calories. As we pedaled through fields and mountains, the only breaks we took were to eat. As seasoned bikepackers, we devoured every calorie we could during gas station breaks while laughing at the ridiculous blends of food we threw together to stay fueled. The sheer number of calories we burned prompted me to consider the environmental cost of our food. Out of curiosity, I looked up some simplified carbon footprint numbers for our fuel for the entire trip and comparisons:

- Scenario 1: Haribo + Coke (pretty close to what I actually ate)
  - 2 kg of Haribo (~6,800 kcal, 1.83 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/kg)
  - 8 cans of Coke (~1,200 kcal, ~0.2 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/can)
  - Total emissions round-trip: ~5 kg CO<sub>2</sub>
- Scenario 2: Chocolate Milk (a well-known bikepacking staple)
  - 8 L (8,000 kcal, 2.64 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/L)
  - Total emissions: ~20 kg CO<sub>2</sub>
- Alternative Forms of Travel to cycling
- Driving my 2012 Impreza: Vancouver to Kulshan ~60 kg CO<sub>2</sub>
- With 4 people carpooling: 15 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/person
- Heli ski: 620 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/person
- Flight: (round-trip) from Vancouver to Tokyo: 1,400 kg CO<sub>2</sub>/person

*Sources: Carbon Cloud, CO<sub>2</sub> Everything, Northern Escape Heli Ski*

The numbers surprised me. Depending on your fuel choice, biking to a trailhead might have a higher carbon footprint than carpooling. It's a reminder that the environmental impact of our adventures is often more complex than we might expect (though, for perspective, even a choco-milk-fueled Kulshan attempt is still only 3% of a heli-ski or 1.5% of an international flight).

That complexity brought to mind Ross Reid's excellent article, "Is Outdoor Recreation a Source of Resource Extraction?" Reid invites the reader to reconsider the notion that outdoor pursuits are inherently low-impact or ethical. He points out that even well-intentioned adventures can carry hidden social, cultural, and environmental costs, either in the gear we rely on, the emissions we produce to reach trailheads, or the ways we treat nature as something to conquer or consume. However, Reid's piece isn't about guilt; it's about reflecting more deeply on how we get outside and what that means. He invites us to move beyond individual achievement toward a more reciprocal relationship with the outdoors – one that honors our land and community through the way we give back.

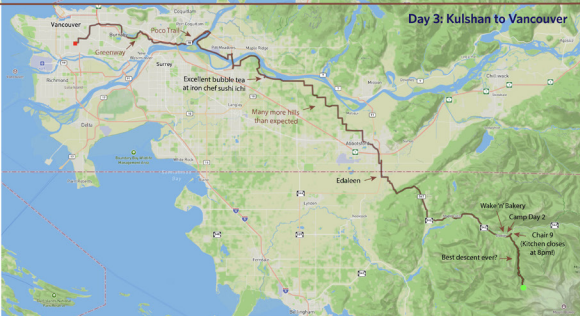
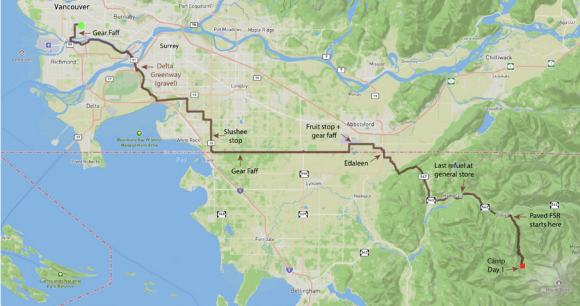
I see those values in the VOC all the time – carpools, work hikes, our gear library, and ever-patient trip leaders welcoming new folks. Reading Reid has made me reflect on my own choices more intentionally. While biking to the trailhead instead of carpooling might not be inherently more sustainable in terms of my environmental footprint, it does align with what I seek in the outdoors: a deeper way to share the journey with others and a practical way to squeeze more adventure and movement into a short window of time. This captures the essence of ‘ecopointing’ a concept coined by climber Lena Müller as a play on redpoint and greenpoint. The term expands the idea of ‘send’ to encompass the entire approach, encouraging low-impact travel methods like biking, hiking, or public transit. It promotes a mindset that values the entire journey, not just the climb.

For this trip, the journey started long before the trailhead. By the time we reached the base of the regular route, we’d already fine-tuned our setups, navigated a mix of trails and car-centric infrastructure, gained over a thousand meters of elevation, and looked out for each other in quiet, practical ways. Ecopointing stretches the journey in both directions as well; when you get back down from your ski, you still have to get yourself home. This can feel enormously daunting, but through methodical effort you make it home under your own power. A shared car ride home can be bonding and restorative, but this kind of return lingers longer, the experience settling more deeply into your body and mind.

Bike-skiing is inherently ridiculous. It’s hard, gear-intensive, and rarely straightforward. But that’s exactly what makes it memorable. It slows you down, pushing you to be more patient and adaptable, and allows you to savor your adventure from the moment you step out of your home. With car spots becoming scarcer on VOC trips and often being the limiting factor for access, this kind of approach offers a different way in. A way that values creativity, community, and the joy of sharing the journey across every part of the land we live on. Thank you for humoring my thoughts, maybe ecopointing can be part of your next adventure too. Now, onto the trip report.

**June 2024:** Declan Taylor publishes his trip report of a Baker Bike-n-ski with Jacob Grossbard and Zoe Neudorf. This instantly becomes my goal for 2025. Thanks for the lovely trip report, Declan!

**April 2025:** Our initial plan for attempting this objective was over the April long weekend, over 4 days, as recommended by the aforementioned report. However, bad weather forces us to call off the trip and I ended up doing a self-propelled trip to Pelion instead with Corey. Pelion ended up being a cumulative 4400 m in 3 days which gave us the idea we could also attempt Kulshan in 3 days.



**May 2025:** We set a date for attempting Kulshan at the beginning of June. Vivian, Corey, Nico, and I all knew each other through gravel biking and had experience with long days with big elevation, so we decided to commit to the 3-day attempt and set a date for attempting Kulshan on the first week-end of June. As the date drew closer, the weather looked clear but was expected to be unseasonably warm – 20 degrees at the base and 5 degrees above freezing at the top. We had some real concerns about the snow being too soft or unstable for a summit attempt, but as we learned, it would still freeze overnight and remain firm. The weather forecast turned out to be perfect.

**June 7th:** 144km, 1800m bike. We aimed for a 7:30 am start, but Vivian had to re-bleed her brakes that morning, and Nico, who packed the



*Top to bottom*  
**1** Map  
**2** Left to right: Vivian Liu, Nico Petch, Corey Monteith  
**3** Kulshan at sunset  
 Helena Sverak

day of, rolled in a little late. By 8:30 am, we were rolling. Rack slippage and gear fuff slowed us down early, but once we ski-strapped everything and found our rhythm, we made great time and reached White Rock by noon. One other complication was a nagging overuse knee injury I had due to a muscle imbalance, and I hemmed and hawed about bailing all the way to Delta. Miraculously, somewhere on a climb to White Rock, my knee tightness loosened, and I started to believe I could actually complete this trip.

We crossed into the U.S. at Sumas around 3:30 pm, and after a stop at Edaleen's to enjoy some American dairy, we started up into the Cascades on a beautiful paved road. We refueled in Maple Falls around 7 pm and met a group attempting a one-day bike-ski push from Bellingham (just when you think you're doing something hard...). They were exhausted but offered fresh beta. The route was good, the snow was firm in the morning, and "the bike goes on forever." That didn't do much for morale about the ride still ahead, but it eased my worries about the snow being too soft, which felt like a win.

After our gas station meals, we turned onto the paved FSR. Some steep gradients forced a bit of bike-pushing, but it wasn't as brutal as I feared. We arrived at dusk and camped in the forest by the trailhead. Lights went out at 11 pm and alarms were set for 1:30 am.

**June 8th:** 20km, 2092m ski; 15km, 31m bike. Waking up was tough. I lay in the tent, pondering the fact that if I just went back to sleep, the rest of my crew would probably be back by the time I woke up. Corey convinced me that I actually wanted to go see the top while I ate a pop tart and caffeine pill, so I got myself together, and we were off hiking by 2:30 am.

The beginning of the hike was very mellow and the stars twinkled above. We crossed a few streams before reaching a rushing river that we had to cross, which dropped into nothingness beside the trail. In our bleary morning eyes, there were no good options. Corey went first, finding a line between the rocks. "It's grippy, you just have to commit". I'm not sure if I've ever been so scared, but I went next, and as they say in climbing, a weighted foot never slips. Viv made it across next, and Nico, the only one of us who had brought trail runners, walked straight through the water. Onwards we went.

We arrived at the snow faster than I thought and transitioned to skis as dawn glowed around us. I looked up and watched a mountain goat walk out onto a ledge and lie down, looking at the sunrise. What a life it must be. Before heading onto the glacier, we made our way up the gully to arrive at Hogsback camp around 6:00 am. It seemed that plenty of other ski mountaineer keeners had yet to leave camp, so it gave us more confidence in the timing and conditions. While the crevasses were reasonably obvious, the extra warm weather and sags in the snow weren't particularly inspiring, so we followed the general trend of roping up once we got to around 2150 m. The sun beat down on us as

we navigated the rope with our skis, trekking with other groups up the skin track to the base of the ridge. Even though the snow was only semi-frozen, ski crampons proved a considerable help once the slope steepened, even in mid-June.

We reached the exposed ridge at 9 am and took a long breakfast/lunch break in the sun. While a sheltered break at the base of the climb might have been a bit more comfortable, the ridge offered a glimpse of Tahoma peeking through the skyline, which was worth braving the wind. After a solid rest, we set up our A-frames, crampons, and packed up our rope. We remained unroped for the rest of the trip.

From there, it was a steady bootpack up the beaten path. Despite its reputation, the Roman Wall felt manageable as we went at our own pace. Our ridge break gave me enough energy to feel chipper on the way up, even as our fatigue was accumulating, and we got up the wall in about an hour. By 11:45 am, we made it up onto the false summit plateau and took in the clear view of Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, and the North Shore Mountains in the distance. After enjoying the views and a horizontal position for a bit, we tagged the true summit, transitioned, and dropped down at 12:30 pm. Conditions were perfect – soft, carveable, and safe.

The ski down was an absolute blast. We were on the lookout for crevasse sags (shout out to Nico for booting over one, you are braver than I'll ever be), but had no problems, hooting and hollering in joy past dejected mountaineers who were walking. We were at our transition in no time, and back at the river crossing by 3 pm. In daylight, we saw the exposure was worse than I had imagined, but we made it across without issue once again. Viv, in her wisdom, found a much chillier crossing about 10 to 20 meters upriver which I highly recommend to anyone else facing this particular problem.

We were back in our tents by 4 pm and allowed ourselves an hour-long nap to regain some strength before beginning the dreaded task of packing the bikes (by far the worst part of bike-skiing). It took us until 7 pm to organize. While faffing, we met a group of Washington explorers on their own wild self-propelled mission: skiing up the CD route, down the Squak on the other side, biking to some stashed kayaks, then paddling to the ocean following the glacial melt. After swapping beta and self-propelled inspiration, we finally rolled out, aiming for Chair 9 in Glacier for pizza and beer before it closed at 9 pm.

The bike ride down is what I might describe as pure euphoria. Flowing through the turns down all of this elevation with Kulshan in the background and no huge hills hiding in front of us felt like a beautiful reward to our effort. This was a contrast to rolling up to the pub, only to be told their kitchen had closed at 8 pm. We dejectedly ate our leftovers in their parking lot. We biked to our campsite for the night by the river with a beautiful view, and gave ourselves

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a full 8 hours of excellent sleep.

**June 9th:** 141km, 880m bike. We woke to sunshine and the river bubbling beside us. After a lazy morning and pastries at Wake 'n' Bakery, we started to make our way home by 11 am. The kilometers flew by in the Cascades, and we were at the border right after noon. After another refuel at Edaleen, we made our way past the border and back into Canada. We took an alternate route home through Abbotsford, delivering more hills and a harsher bonk than expected, but I was revived in Fort Langley with white rice and very good value bubble tea.

From there, we took a gravel route that was almost entirely off-road, making use of our gravel bikes and enjoying the absence of cars. We meandered through the Maple Ridge dykes onto the Poco trail, making our way to the Greenway before finally getting home around 8 pm We ordered two party trays of sushi from Samurai Sushi on Fraser (best sushi portion sizes in the city!) and celebrated. As we biked through my neighborhood of Sunset, Kulshan appeared on the horizon. It felt unreal that we had come all the way from there just that morning, under our own power. I'm so grateful to the VOC and my friends for the inspiration, mentorship, and stoke that made this trip possible. I'll need to set a new objective for next year, but it's hard to imagine something that could top this one.

Total: 320km distance, 4800m elevation, 60 hours door to door.

**Left** Colfax Peak

**Middle** True summit with Vancouver in the background

**Right** Kulshan in the distance as we approach Sumas



# My Toxic Relationship with The Splitboard

*Joseph Chiao*

*April 4-5, 2025*

*The Garibaldi Neve*

*Participants: Joseph Chiao, Aaron Lee*

Like that ex you keep going back to hook up with after they hurt you, I have a similar relationship with the club splitboard.

A couple of months ago, I had an absolute horror show on that board at Brew. My skin was falling off on the way up, different parts were getting stuck, and worst of all, the entire heel side on both bindings disintegrated on the way down. It was an absolute sufferfest, despite the trip itself being relatively chill. Having experienced this, I came back with the “I can fix her” mentality. The binding was reinforced with beefier screws, the skin was fixed, and it seemed the splitboard had once again returned to working order.

The weekend before our trip, one Duncan MacIntyre invited me to join his Neve trip for a single-day south-to-north push. I had to decline due to a scheduling conflict, but it planted an idea in my head. All throughout the week, I bugged people to join me on the Neve. At the exec meeting on Wednesday, I found Aaron Lee, who was also keen on a single-day Neve push. He wanted to tag Garibaldi on the side too, which seemed reasonable given the relatively small detour. Since neither of us knows how to ski, we decided that splitboarding would be our best bet.

To avoid afternoon heating which would cause bad avalanche conditions, we agreed on an early start. First, we settled on 4:00 am, then pushed it to 2:00 am, and eventually decided to skip sleeping altogether and leave as soon as I got off work at 8:30 pm. We also figured that by car-swapping with the Steps to the Neve group, we could do the trip with just one car—though this meant doing the Neve in the opposite direction from how it’s usually done.

After two and a half hours of online tutoring, Aaron picked me up minutes after I hung up the Zoom call. It was around 10:30 pm when we got to Squamish—I devoured a burger and a coffee at A&W, having not eaten since lunch. The drive up was cheerful, both of us excited about the challenge ahead, unaware of what we were getting ourselves into.

The first ~4 km of the trail were completely dry, and we deeply appreciated our comfy snowboarding boots. As we climbed the switchbacks, we ran into a guy I can only describe as an alternate version of Jeff. The man was alone, hauling planks twice his height beside his skis, in the middle of the night. He said he was headed to the Sentinel hut for repairs. We continued past him after commending his effort. The rest of the climb to the lake was uneventful, aside from a slight slip that bent one of my poles into a ski racing pole.

Crossing the lake was simply magical. There was not a shred of cloud, and the stars alone were enough to negate the need for headlamps. As we walked west, the moon rose behind the hills and bathed our surroundings in a gentle silver glow. A few shooting stars and an aurora to the north made the sky come alive. The entire time across the lake, we looked up instead of ahead, captivated by the night sky. We stopped for a snack in the middle of the lake, appreciating both the treats we brought and the view above.

As we started to ascend Sentinel Glacier, I encountered my first gear problem. My right ski wouldn't lean left, no matter how much I twisted my leg. This meant that whenever the hill was to the left, my right ski lost traction. After a lot of struggling, I gave up and started bootpacking. Unfortunately, the snow didn't support my weight on the steeper sections, which led to much frustration. Every step I lifted my leg as high as it would go, only to gain about half a foot of elevation. It was exhausting and time-consuming (this is a recurring theme). Eventually, I reached a flatter section, put my skis back on, and watched as the sun began to light up the sky.

By this point, I was already questioning whether we'd be able to tag Mount Garibaldi. I hadn't slept since the previous day, and the climb up Sentinel Bay had drained me. As a two-person team, we had to make conservative choices. At 7:30 am, we took a break near the turn off for Garibaldi and practiced setting up anchors. The nail in the coffin came when we realized the snow was too soft for the snow flukes we brought. Since there was no quick or easy way to set up an anchor, the risk just didn't seem worth it anymore. We gave up on the objective—a good decision in hindsight.

As we got past the apex of the traverse, the snow turned icy. We transitioned under Atwell around 10:30 am and started our descent. Snowboarding on ice is not fun; there's little control, especially when the surface is bumpy. We passed several groups of skiers doing the Neve in the usual direction, including our very own Steps to the Neve group, who gave us beta for Ring Creek and the Gargoyles.

The skin track near Ring Creek went up and down, which is the worst possible thing for a splitboarder. Constant sidehilling killed my calves, and the hops to get up every 50 metres didn't help either. As we descended further and the sun climbed higher, the canyon started to feel like a microwave.

The re-ascent toward Elfin was by far the worst part of the trip. There were no existing skin tracks uphill. Aaron went first, triggering slides of unconsolidated snow. I, being about 20 lbs heavier, couldn't take a single step without the whole face collapsing under me. Skis were useless for me here, so I took them off and bootpacked. This wasn't much better, since I would sometimes sink to my chest in soft snow. During the 40-minute period we spent on this hill, we advanced 40 meters horizontally and 40 meters vertically. Luckily for us, this section wasn't too long and was out of any avalanche path. Our next challenge was to cross the many debris fields from previous days of wet, loose avalanches. This section was a bit easier, though still tricky in places. Seeing how slipping down a debris field was not on our to-do list of the day, we had to go quite slowly in certain places to avoid such fate.

After that, the trail to Elfin was comparatively easy. There was a small navigation hiccup, costing me about ten extra metres of gain. Otherwise, it was smooth sailing. We arrived at the shelter at 3:30 pm and took a well-deserved 30 minute break. Stepping indoors felt like coming home. In the shelter, we repeatedly asked ourselves why we made the decision to embark on this death march. We were unable to produce any reasonable answer.

As we departed the lakes, we felt like the trip was pretty much over. The remaining 5 km of skinning was easy. Having dried our skins at the shelter, they became way more functional compared to the ascent earlier. However, the end of this trip was not without its drama. 50 metres before we transitioned to go down, my left toe strap decided to break off. This is absolutely devastating news. For those unfamiliar with the art of snowboarding, allow me to explain this predicament: The toe strap is used to lift one of the edges of the snowboard. Its absence means it is now very easy to catch the toe edge, turning left becomes difficult and dangerous, and braking becomes unreliable. Imagine a car where the steering wheel is ten times less sensitive when turning left, and the brakes might send you rolling instead of stopping you. So, given the situation, I decided that my best course of action is just to straight-line it down the FSR, since that would minimize any big movements which might cause problems. This ended up working out well, and the only time I fell was right at the very end trying to slow down for the parking lot. I ended my Neve trip on the ground next to the park map, still strapped to my board and not believing what we have just completed. The traverse took 19 hours and 10 minutes in the end, the longest single-day trip I've done.

Having once again had my day turned into hell by the club splitboard, I once again swore that I would never touch that piece of garbage again. She

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had once again hurt my feelings, and I wasn't gonna let that happen again. The Monday after when I brought the board in, the head QMs decided to retire the board and sent it to the dumpster. I, clearly still having attachment issues, was reluctant to see her go. I've had no good memories on that board, yet its departure somehow made me emotional. Not even a week has gone by and I am already missing her. I mean, if she can complete the Neve, then there's nothing she can't do. Maybe I should go find her in the trash and try to fix her again, because I'm sure this time it would be different.

*Top Left* Baker in the distance *Joseph Chiao*

**Right** Me, swimming? *Aaron Lee*

*Bottom Left* Cooler than skiing *Aaron Lee*

**Right** Approaching the Shark Fin *Joseph Chiao*

**Aaron's Thoughts (or what I learned while crossing the Neve overnight)**



1. Personally, forgoing sleep entirely meant a safer drive up the Sea to Sky. It meant driving up around 10:00 pm—a time at which I’m usually still awake and functioning, as opposed to 3:00 am—a time at which I’m normally asleep.
2. A functional headlamp was CRUCIAL for making meaningful progress through the dark forest. However, if going barebones with no redundancy, one headlamp per pair was sufficient (thanks Joseph). In the alpine with clear skies, a moon at first quarter on snow was enough to see vaguely until the moon set. Garibaldi Lake was very pretty in the moonlight under a clear sky.
3. Consider snow conditions if bootpacking is ever required. On our ascent from the lake to Glacier Pikes, we ran into an icy crust with pretty soft snow underneath. The ice made skinning up/switchbacking awkward. When we opted to bootpack, we punched through the ice and struggled to go up on the soft snow. This cost us ~20 minutes. More on bootpacking blunders later.
4. Consider learning how to place snow flukes before relying on your crevasse rescue system. This was a reckless decision on our part and contributed to us bailing on Nch’kay (Garibaldi).
5. I am easily objective-blinded. With Nch’kay in sight, it felt like a foolish waste of sweat and sleep-deprived effort. It took time, humility, and many reality checks from Joseph to realize we had reached our decision point by the Sharkfin a little late in the day and with too little energy in reserve.
6. If we had gone ahead with Nch’kay, we would have crossed the Gar-goyle avalanche paths around 2:00-4:00 pm (prime wet loose season). We would have likely spent more time wallowing in soft snow as well. If something had gone wrong on the ascent or descent, the energy Joseph or I had to help each other could have been insufficient and would leave little margin for error. Finally, our sleep-deprived brains are probably not the most rational in a pinch.
7. Under the baking sun, my cooked brain gravitated to the word “wallowing”. Definition: Wal-low (/ˈwælō/): 1) To roll about or lie in water, snow, mud, dust, or the like, as for refreshment or in a lazy, relaxed, or ungainly manner. 2) to live self-indulgently; luxuriate; revel. 3) to flounder about; move along or proceed clumsily or with difficulty. We wallowed under Definition 3 through soft snow out of Ring Creek. My brain still really likes this word, I don’t think I’ve recovered fully... wallowing.

## Can We Make It Up Cloudburst?

*Sunny Das*

*April 18, 2025 - April 19, 2025*

*Cloudburst Mountain*

*Participants: Sunny Das, Duncan MacIntyre, Tristan Lefferts, Kat Krupova, Simon Tsianikas, Justin Lau, and Eleanor Hsiun*

**Friday, April 18, 2025:**

Who would turn down one last spring ski tour hurrah? In the midst of finals and formulating summer plans, Duncan MacIntyre decided to post a 'beginner-friendly' overnight ski tour trip to Cloudburst Mountain. The idea was to introduce elementary ski tourers into the land of winter camping and minor suffering. A prerequisite, though, was that everyone had to have their Avalanche Safety Training (AST-1). This little detail might have saved the trip from complete disaster, despite the lack of avalanches.

Duncan, Tristan Lefferts, Kat Krupova, and I piled into one car and left UBC at the ripe hour of 2:30 pm (Prior commitments caused the trip to have quite a lazy start.) Simon Tsianikas, Justin Lau, and Eleanor Hsiun drove up in another. Our first hurdle was traffic. Advice for the future: maybe it's a bad idea to try to drive up the sea to sky in the afternoon on Good Friday. But alas, as the fearless leader Duncan said, "We'll get there when we get there."

And so, we reached a giant hole in the road at approximately 5 pm. Now, in doing research for this trip, there was no indication that it should be difficult to ascend this particular Forest Service Road (FSR). And yet, it seemed Duncan's Mazda was having trouble. The hole was wider than his car and encompassed most of the road, with slivers of a smooth path on both sides. We all got out of the car and directed him as he tried going to the left. Tires spun out. Then to the right – tires spun out. Left again. And, tires spun out. Shit. Our next plan of attack was moving rocks to fill parts of the hole on the sides and

hoping that would provide the necessary support for the car. Result? Tires spun out.

Thirty minutes later, we stood there contemplating our plan. It was already 5:30 pm and we had no idea if Justin's car was ahead of us or behind us. For all we knew, his car would not be able to pass this blockage even if we could. And for all we knew, the road ahead would prove to be unpassable. A certain resignation came across us. Maybe we should just call it a day and go back to swim in the river.

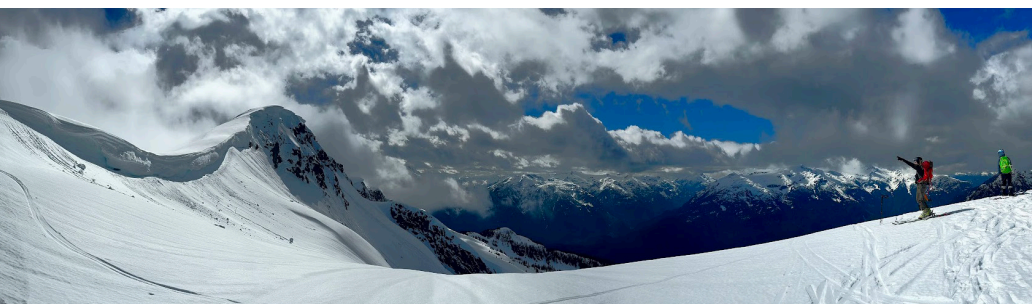
What if we just tried one more time with twigs instead of rocks and packed in the dirt really hard? With a determined face and a foot clamped on the gas, Duncan did it. We literally cheered, and hope was renewed. We were gonna make it up no matter what.

The road after was bad, but negotiable. As we drove up through the evening light, we saw the river descend below us as the mountains crept up to the sky. "This made the trip for me, even if we have to turn around right now," Tristan laughed, as we all experienced that fulfilling sense of awe and beauty only the sight of the peaks can evoke. Finally, our radio signal caught, and we learned that Justin's car was ahead; they had not suffered the same problems that we had. And so we travelled on together, crossing a river and putting on our chains when the snow got deeper.

10 meters later, the tires glitched out. Duncan went to investigate. There was a steep-ish uphill slope, deep snow, and no way we would make it. We were still kilometers away from the point Duncan had thought we would be able to drive up to and it was late – almost 8 pm But we had no choice. We reversed the car, parked, and got our ski gear on. Time to skin up.

That lasted for about 3 minutes until the road became brown again. We carried our skis until the white patch came, put them on, only to take them off again. We walked and walked, and began to wonder when we would stop. It seemed the road would stay dirt for a ways. Our spirits low and our minds cranky, we gathered in a circle and decided we should make A-frames. Except, problem. Two people hadn't brought their hiking boots from the car, and we were expecting to be bootpacking for another 2 hours. "Honestly, at this point, we could just camp here and go up tomorrow," Eleanor suggested as Duncan ran back to the cars to get their boots. Everyone was trying to maintain good spirits, but it was becoming quite a chore to patch a smile on the descending evening.

Duncan returned and we started moving. Our packs were heavy, but our spirits climbed high as we actually made progress for what felt like the first



time all day. We were doing something, despite our constant lamentations that we totally could have driven this road and this was all a waste of time anyways. At 10 p.m we hit snow again, strapped on the skis, and began the ascent that Duncan planned to arrive at about 5 hours earlier. At this point, our plan was definitely adjusted. We knew we probably would not be able to sleep in the alpine like we had hoped, but we just wanted to cover as much ground as possible. At around 10:30 pm, however, we were feeling quite beat and found a bubbling waterfall next to a stretch of flat land. We decided to make a somewhat unconventional camp: Duncan, Kat, and I squished into Duncan's two-person tent for warmth, while Simon slept right next to the river, preferring the blaring rush of water as a soothing source of 'white noise.' Eleanor and Justin were normal people in their individual tents.

What time should we wake up tomorrow? "I prefer not to be too early. Maybe 8:30 am?" Simon said. I laughed. "What kind of VOC trip have you been on? We should wake up at 7 am." 7 am was vetoed, so we compromised for 8 am the next day. I passed out cold.

**Saturday, April 19, 2025:**

I woke up at 8:20 am and the irony was not lost on me. Simon was up at 7:30 am, for God knows what reasons. Duncan had snoozed his alarm, and I had slept through it altogether. So, the morning was not early. We set out for the summit at about 10 am. We were making good progress at the beginning, with much lighter packs since we had left our tents and night gear by the streams. The sky was sunny and our conversation was light and flowing. Some minor obstacles came in our way, like a river crossing that we had to shuttle our packs across, but overall it was pretty smooth sailing. After some time, we saw the summit from our vantage point. It looked miles away. Would we make it? We forged ahead.

At around 1 pm, the clouds started to roll in fast. We sat down for a snack break and the sunny skies disappeared. Visibility was low, and we questioned the safety of the avalanche conditions. Would we be able to see? We couldn't assess where we were. After a series of unfortunately difficult kick-turns for people like me who cannot quite figure out how to stand on one leg and kick out with the other, the skinning became a slog. Justin and Eleanor were great teachers, giving me tips and trips, but the going was still slow. The visibility was close to zero and we passed by a couple of skiers who had just been to the summit. They said they couldn't see anything. Our hopes to get to the top were looking less and less likely. Maybe we would have to turn back. At least we'd gotten that far. It had been pretty, we'd seen good views. Summit fever might have to wait for next time.

We decided to hunker down in this convenient tree well, taking shelter from the wind and eating our lunch to see if the clouds would pass. It

was 1:30 pm We would probably be able to make it to the top if we left soon and still make it down in time to get to the cars and down the shitty FSR before dark, but only if we were fast. We gave it half an hour. If it hadn't cleared up by then, we would bail.

Luckily, blue skies peaked out from behind the grey masses and we decided to give it a go. Approaching a series of rather steep hills, we had to kick-turn our way to the top. I once again struggled, but Eleanor gave me a hand. Justin congratulated me on every well-done turn, though I eventually fell behind the group when the steepness factor exponentially increased. So this was the 'minor suffering' Duncan had spoken of on the trip agenda. I was tired but didn't want to admit it, hopelessly behind, frustrated, and a tiny bit scared. Despite it all, I knew I should continue to push forward. I wasn't at my limits. I could do this.

Eventually, I caught up with the rest of the group. We'd made it! Almost. As we looked out at the summit close by, we marveled at the massive cornice hanging precariously off its edge. The AST-1 alarm bells were ringing in my head, and in Kat and Eleanor's too. Imagine if at the end of all that, we decided to defy the odds and ended up dead. It seemed too risky to be worth it.

Duncan suggested we go on a little bit farther and see if there was enough space on the left to safely pass by. We agreed that that would be wise and upon further investigation, realized we had identified the true summit wrongly. It wasn't at the top of the huge cornice, but rather was farther across and to the left. There was also plenty of space to pass by the cornice without it being risky if we stuck to the previously bootpacked path. So, all of us decided we were comfortable giving it a go. After about five minutes, we arrived at the tower. What a sight it was. We had made it up Cloudburst.

Staring in awe and reveling in our championship, we rejoiced for a journey well-spent. Photos were taken. Hands were shaken. Sorry, I meant we gave each other high fives. I wanted to rhyme though to assert the epicness. Trust me, it was epic. You can't capture it in the photos, but there was almost a panoramic view of the Tantalus range on the left side all the way over to Garibaldi on the right. The mountains soared over the valleys as the Squamish

**Left** Can we make it to Cloudburst? We can? *Eleanor Hsiun*

**Right** Eating brekkie *Simon Tsianikas*



River ran through. Clouds burst through the sun, or was it the sun that burst through the clouds? I can't remember. But one thing is for certain: a smile burst through our eyes as we looked over the sheer majesty that lay before us. This was it.

At 3 pm, we began our descent. The adrenaline of the summit fell off as I struggled to keep my skis in line down the ice. They slid all over the place, seemingly out of control, and I wondered if getting down the mountain would be harder than getting up. Coming to the place where I had extreme difficulty kick-turning up, I bootpacked down with Duncan. There was just no way I would be able to ski down that terrain in that ice. Luckily, the ice stopped soon after and it turned into gentle powder. I got my footing, more or less, and we whooped down the slopes. Still, progress was slow and we were not super sure we would get back to the cars on time. Weaving through the trees and forest, we tried our best to keep it quick. Yet when we arrived back to the tents, darkness was already encroaching. We packed up fast, skied down until the dirt, and began the long road bootpacking. Our favourite refrain from the previous day reappeared: we could have driven this whole thing. But instead, we walked it.

There's a point when your A-frame is hitched upon your shoulders and you can feel them collapsing under the weight. That was about how we were feeling when we finally found the cars. Once again, jubilation struck as we removed the heavy packs and felt our aching shoulders breathe. "Was this a beginner-friendly trip?" Duncan asked. A conclusive no. Had a true beginner come on this trip, it would have been a miserable time. But despite the troubles and turmoil, we packed into the cars with that content VOC-trip feeling of soreness and accomplishment. We had made it up Cloudburst.

# Red Heather Chaos: Hot Chocolate Tasting, Overslept Alarms, and Tree Wells

*AC Muller*

*Saturday, March 15th*

*Red Heather Hut*

*Participants: AC Muller, Sri Chaitanya, Diego Fernandez, Tra Mi Do Le, JJ James, Lucile Paschal, Eemaan Alam, Ellen Scott, Roseisa Weeraratne, Faisal Maqbool, Tristan Lefferts, Joanne Ho, Zack Peachell, Cecily Downs, Ivana Sanchez Olivares, Tejas Vijay, Duncan MacIntyre, Andrew Carriere, Yuze Zhou, Sarah Tischer, Toji Nakabayashi, Eleanor Hsiun*

Note: this trip report is a messed-up tale, where I both tell the general story of the trip, but also add some fun anecdotes about my experience attempting to ski for the third time in my life.

**E**ver since Marie Sandler's Bring Your Own Cheese trip to Semaphore Lakes back in September, I have been inclined to organize a similar trip myself. Combined with my search for the best hot chocolate in Vancouver, I quickly came to the conclusion that I simply have to host a hot chocolate tasting somewhere in the backcountry. The idea was to have everybody bring their own powder/solid chocolate/spices, etc., and have everybody try each other's creations while sitting in the snow.

For context, this was my first time leading a trip in the backcountry, and only my third time on skis. So, I very much knew that I would likely face a few challenges.

The first such challenge arose while we were still driving along the Sea-to-Sky. I received a message from a participant saying that their driver, who was supposed to pick them up 40 minutes ago, still hadn't shown up. Well, how fun. I frantically started calling the two people responsible for this car (I shall not disclose their identities), and after a few minutes, I finally got a call back from a VERY sleepy person on the other end. We chatted for a bit and

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came to the conclusion that this car would simply have to stay home, since they would pull up to the parking lot way too late. But then, a mere two minutes later, I was called back saying they had changed their mind – they wanted to come. Knowing that this car had three very experienced people, and with their assurances that they were awake enough to drive, we decided that they could simply join us a few hours late.

Duncan Macintyre and I had planned to stop at the Save-On in Squamish to buy fresh milk (because milk powder is simply not fun). While doing that, Sri Chaitanya decided to grab breakfast from the café nearby. I was shocked to hear this man seriously order a hot chocolate when we're about to embark on a trip where the whole point is to drink as much hot chocolate as possible. I suppose he wanted to get a head start. 12 litres of milk later, we continued our journey.

We finally reached the lower parking lot, where we started shuttling people in the only car that had chains. Some hiked up, while most of the skiers piled into Yuze Zhou's car, true to the VOC ways. Finally, we started the hike/skin up to the Red Heather warming shelter. Tristan Lefferts, Duncan and I each had a 4L milk jug in our packs, with other people all carrying their respective ingredients.

The people who reached the hut early had started scouting for a good place to build a table in the snow and found a wonderful space with some trees that we used to set up tarps. Our trusty engineers, Eemaan Alam and Ellen Scott, found a way to tie the tarps to skis and ski poles to shield us from the quite intense snowfall.

Soon after the shelter was in place, people started heating up milk, with only a few pots boiling over. Anybody who has heated up milk knows how challenging it is to prevent this – and now imagine that on a camping cooker in the snow!

The tasting started, and people started passing around pots and mugs filled with wonderfully warm hot chocolate.

Now, you might be wondering, what creations did we come up with? Well, here are some examples (but there were many more!).

Made with 3% Dairyland milk:

- Tristan – Smoked Hershey's milk chocolate bar, smoked cedar shavings (from Pacific Spirit Park).
- Duncan – Cocoa powder, brown sugar, semisweet chocolate chips.
- Sri – Lindt Pistachio solid chocolate, freshly grated orange zest, cardamom, cinnamon, whipped cream.
- AC – 70% Western Family solid chocolate, cocoa powder, freshly grated orange zest, whipped cream.
- Zack Peachell – Tim Hortons Hot Chocolate powder (no comment).

Dairy-free versions:

- Sarah Tischer - Castle Kitchen memorable maple dark chocolate; plant-based milk: half and half Enjoy Hazelnut and Silk Whole Nextmilk; Club House pure peppermint and mint extract.

I have to say, it was a wonderful experience to taste everybody's hot chocolates. However, I must admit, despite the warmth of our beverages and many foam pads to sit on, it got rather chilly (I suppose that's a side effect of snow). So, a bunch of us skiers decided to start getting some laps in. After skinning up for a bit, it was time to transition – which is when it got obvious how incredibly deep the powder was. Keep in mind, this was my third time skiing. Sri just casually decided to inform me right then and there that using pizza in powder is not really possible. Yay! With many falls, I somehow made it down (shoutout to Sri for pulling me out of the snow more than once). I definitely didn't faceplant somewhere on the way, no. It was a truly interesting and frustrating experience. But clearly, it didn't bother me too much - Toji Nakabayashi, Sarah Tischer, Eleanor Hsuin, Sri, and I decided to skin back up and get one more lap in before Sri and I had to head back down to our car group.

While the others went ahead, I took it slow and made it down with many falls and whatnot, feeling very weak in my legs (I should add that I fell ill a day later, so there's a good chance I was already under the weather without



*Top to bottom*

- 1** Joanne with her hot chocolate *Faisal M*
- 2** Cheers! *Faisal M*
- 3** Sri was very proud of his creation *AC Muller*
- 4** I love milk *Sri Chaitanya*



**Left** Heating up milk **Right** Mooore happy people! *Faisal Maqbool*

knowing, which definitely affected my balance). Eleanor gave me some sour peach gummies to bring back my energy, which was insanely appreciated. We had a short way to go to the hut when I stopped just before a tiny but very steep slope, and I began to slide forward. I tried to back up – but clearly, I had forgotten that there was a tree directly behind me. Lo and behold, I slid backwards right into the tree well. Luckily, I went down feet first, and my upper body was mostly still above the snow, but my skis and legs were stuck underneath several layers of powder. My legs were overstretched, and I was slightly panicking and in pain. Sri managed to dig me out very quickly, and the rest of the way went smoothly. But I have to say that was an interesting experience, and I'm glad nothing worse happened.

We got back to the hut to find out that everybody had already left, apart from our car group. Oops... So, after taking a short break in the shelter and befriending some older VOCers (also Germans!) who had skinned up with their children, Sri, Duncan, Tristan and I started heading down to our car. This was my first time skiing down the trail myself, so I was happy to see it somehow worked. Meanwhile, Tristan's ski kept popping out. I honestly don't even know how to describe our way down – we were all hyped up, and probably went a bit crazy. It was such a fun time, and I cannot express my gratitude for this merry rabble enough. We made it to the upper parking lot and decided to attempt to ski as far down as possible. At that point, we had all definitely gone absolutely crazy. Sri started doing 360s, Tristan sat down on his skis, and Duncan probably also did something insane (I was too focused on not falling to see). Then, the rocks started causing issues to the point where Tristan's skis were sparking. Shortly after that, Duncan took a pretty hard fall (he actually got a concussion from this), which is when we decided to stop immediately and bootpack down.

The joy did not stop there. Duncan had already announced that he was not sure whether we'd have enough gas to make it to Squamish. In addition to that, this car did not have winter tires. So yes, we had to push it out of

the parking spot to get it going. The car told us we had one km left in range. Uhhhhhhhh..... So Duncan put the car into neutral, and we simply hoped for the best. Luckily, the range first jumped to five km, then ten km, and ultimately ended at 25 km when we reached the gas station. I should also add that the drive was quite enjoyable, since both Duncan and Tristan simply could not stop chatting away, full of enthusiasm. To this day, I wonder what was in that hot chocolate, or maybe it was the concussion after all. So, all was well. After a quick stop at Tim Hortons to grab some food, we started heading back with some VOC-style deep talks.

All in all, it was a very successful trip, and I am grateful to everyone who came and made this such a fun time. I look forward to drinking more hot chocolate and gaining ski experience. Thank you to everybody, and especially the people who helped me organize and coordinate this trip, the people who brought tarps and mats, and of course, the people who skied much slower than they normally would to let me keep up!

**Photo** The Merry Rabble *Faisal Maqbool*



## Finding My Ski Legs at Steep Creek

*Lydia Dunkin*

**W**hen I arrived in Vancouver in September, I didn't think that I would ski much. The closest I had been to a ski slope in the last six years was one made of diamond-shaped plastic bristles, 96 m above sea level in Kent, England. Every Wednesday after school, I would lap variations of the same slalom course. It was usually raining, and I don't think I really enjoyed it. I was quickly overtaken by those who had spent more time on real snow and developed a profound ski-insecurity. However, my parents love to ski, and on hearing that I had got a place at UBC, declared that this was going to be *my* ski year.

Dutifully, I spent my savings on a Student Season Pass, snow pants with a short elastic, and a long-term ski rental from Sports Junkies, and began trying to find my ski legs again. Ski-insecurity lingering but addicted to these days out on the mountain, I started talking to the wonderful people of the VOC, hearing the words touring, skinning, and powder for the first time!

My translators were very kind, making me feel safe to develop my skills and understanding, lending equipment, adjusting bindings, and running beginner-friendly trips. I am so grateful for these opportunities which kick-started me in this new sport. In comes Ana Ciocoiu, whose idea for a trip geared towards those who don't feel like they fit into typical outdoor spaces really resonated with me. Encouraged in the clubroom by Katie Sattler, I signed up for Girls Gone Wild: Steep Creek.

So, come Friday morning, I was packing for my seventh, eighth, and ninth day in the backcountry, fresh AST, and a ski package rented from the clubroom. The forecast was not looking great, and a MIN report detailing a hefty 2.5 avalanche from only two days before was passed around the group with much concern. To manage expectations, Girls Gone Wild became Girls Gone Mild. I felt that my 'just happy to be here' attitude, typical of exchange students, was protecting me from the group's disappointment at not being able

to safely ski the boldest lines, though by the end of the weekend, we reflected on just how happy we all were to be out in the mountains.

It was not, however, without incident, starting with the second car group's delayed departure from Vancouver. The first group, consisting of Julia Jancelewicz, Em Lion, and myself, had enjoyed a leisurely afternoon approach, sucking on caramel apple lollipops and arriving at Beeker's cabin in time for a banana bread-based dinner. We were asleep by the time the second car group arrived at the trailhead, led by Stefanija Rekasius, fresh from her hospital shift and skinning up the FSR at a remarkable pace. I hear that high spirits were maintained until the final, narrow kilometre, lit by the equally slim beams of their headlamps. It was 1:00 am when they slipped into the hut with a commendable quiet.

This was the first ski trip I had been on where the objective was to lap as much as possible, so, lots to refine in the way of layering, delayering, hydrating, fueling, and transitioning. Switching my boots to ski mode is something I find myself forgetting without fail. On Saturday morning, we headed up the skin track of Cabin Trees and hit the two south- and east-facing bumps at the top of the hill. There were views for miles, fierce cornices and heaps of avalanche debris lit up in the sun. The conditions were amazing, and everyone put in some good turns.

But of course, the good ones are not always the most memorable. Not when I tumbled down the lee-slope, a fraction steeper than our warm-up laps, only to right myself, declare "I'm all good", brake, and tip headfirst into the powder. Ostrich-style. Julia and I later agreed that in that split second of snow immersion, it truly feels like you're drowning. Amusing, but only once you have caught your breath. You'll have to ask Stefanija for the GoPro footage.

Showing their superior stamina, Em and Stefanija headed for a higher objective. Check out what Stefanija had to say about the couloir that they skied! I particularly enjoyed hearing about their decision-making process, taking mental notes for the future.

### Couloir Time

#### **Written by Stefanija Rekasius**

Still having a lot of energy and not wanting to lap the same sections again, Em and I started planning what we would ski. We saw another pair ski down a couloir without causing an avalanche, so we decided to also ski Steep Creek Main Couloir. Knowing that the avalanche forecast was considerable in the alpine with a persistent slab on all faces and that the previous week's snow was not bonding well primarily on west-facing slopes, we decided on a more north-east facing couloir and tested the snowpack as we skinned up, in addition to hand shear tests. We also discussed possible escape routes should we trigger an avalanche while we could still see the entire slope. Soon, we got to the ridge, and

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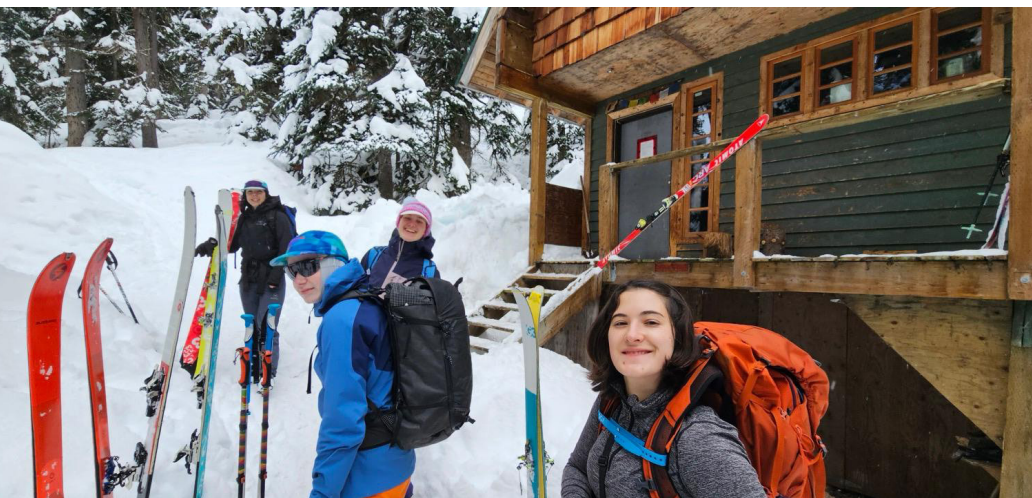
discussed our best entry point. We had both overestimated the steepness of the couloir and were welcomed by very nice turns (with the most powder that I had ever skied... I grew up on the East Coast, and 10 cm of powder for me is insane). We only triggered a bit of fluff and greatly enjoyed the views and skiing, given that the avalanche conditions haven't been super favourable to skiing this season. We skied down to the lake, had a short snack break, and went out again with Lydia and Katie for one more lap before dinner as the storm clouds were rolling in, making skiing on Sunday look less likely.

Late afternoon and the storm was coming in, weighing down the snow as we made our way up for a final run. Em led us down through the trees, casually sending tight turns and what I would describe as small cliffs. Tweaky nerves and tweaky knees, I slipped down behind, calling out for directions.

We had a lovely evening back at the cabin, talking about Julia's drag-on writing, making our way through much of Ana's food, and learning how to dehydrate our own from Katie. Wet slashes of snow blurred the windows of the hut, and it was agreed that we would head back down to the cars first thing in the morning. Well, not quite first thing, as we had yet to test out whether Em's Jiffy Pop would work on the stove.

After waking up the rest of the hut with the black smoke of burning popcorn, we made a hasty exit, skied down to the cars, and headed back to the city, swapping stories on the way. The culture of knowledge-sharing is strong in the VOC, and it has enabled me to try this whole new side of skiing. It's hard to believe that just months ago, I was hesitating to even call myself a skier! This trip helped me feel at home in an environment which had once felt out of reach, a credit to Ana's leadership. We hope it can be part of a larger trip series, creating spaces for those who may not feel welcome or represented in the outdoor activities which they enjoy.

**Photo** Bright-eyed skiers, Katie, Stefanija, Em, and Anna setting up at Beeker's Cabin on Saturday morning. *Julia Jancelewicz*



## Chaos and Calamity on Kulshan

*Stefanija Rekasius*

*April 17-18*

*Mt Kulshan, Washington*

*Participants: Lucas Braun, Em Lion, Stefanija Rekasius*

**I** need a grocery store, I need food". Upon reaching the grocery store and interrogating Lucas on what he needed... "I need electrolytes" and Em Lion and I both groan given that we had just made a one hour detour to get Lucas Braun food when we could have just stopped at literally any gas station.

And so began our adventure to summit Kulshan. I got picked up after my practicum at BC Children's Hospital and we started the drive down to Washington. During that drive we enjoyed listening to an AI summary of Lucas' thesis on Yosemite and bears..."They're massive" and so many other good one liners were created.

We finally reached where we'd take a little nap before attempting our summit of Kulshan. There, Lucas needed to trim his skins and Em needed to adjust their bindings to their boots. Both were done with varying degrees of success including stripped bolts (yes we tried the rubber band method, eventually a hammer was used) and dull skin cutters. It being only 7:00 pm, we all attempted to nap till 10:00 pm, Lucas being the only truly successful person. We then drove up to the trail head, A-framed our skis, and were off at 11:00 pm

We bootpacked through the trees and then reached the alpine. Lucas decided it was time to put on his skis (and ski crampons) while Em and I continued to boot it up just a tad further. The ski crampons weren't taken off until we began our descent, and even on the descent the thought of adding them back on occasionally crossed our minds. It should be noted that our start time was due to the forecasted warming trend, and based on all models made sense; this did not pan out once we reached the treeline. Clear skies and moderate

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winds yielded an impressive radiative freeze crust.

Soon after, we were all on skis with our skins effectively useless given the crust of ice in which often our ski crampons were the only prevention against slipping back down. But the stoke was high and the weather clear, if a tad chilly, so we continued.

Once we got near the bottom of the bergschrund (at the Colfax Col), Lucas and Em were slowing down and not feeling great. As such, a short break was had where we learned that applesauce is not the best thing to consume when nauseous and at altitude, contrary to all other indications from a clinical nutrition perspective. Unfortunately it took quite a lot of convincing and proving to Lucas and Em that the two of them were experiencing altitude sickness as a direct result of sleep deprivation and that the crust was not going to thaw for a while so we should ski down. So at 5:00 am. we experienced a gorgeous start to the sunrise and started our descent.

Lucas being Lucas decided he would ski down to the car no matter what. Em knew a shorter way (Grouse Creek exit). And so the descent began. Lucas, still slightly delirious, decided to book it down as fast as he could and missed the turn off to the short cut, and sent it down the wrong glacier, so he had to skin back up a few hundred meters. The descent was so incredibly icy—and that's coming from someone who grew up skiing on the East coast. We didn't reach softer snow until the point where Em and I decided to take off our skis. Lucas refused to remove his ski, determined to ski until the bitter end, playing human Plinko through the slide alder on snow bridges of dubious



structural integrity down Grouse Creek. Every once in a while a string of swears came from whatever direction he decided looked “better”. Then we learned about the integrity of snow bridges in the forest and were back to the cars at 9:00 am.

Lessons Learned:

- Even if a warming trend is predicted, radiative refreeze + moderate winds can yield some funky conditions.
- Sleep deprivation, limited caloric intake, and altitude do not mix well.
- Makeshift ski leashes of carabiners, key rings, and dog-bones don't work well.
- If you just threw up the food you tried to eat, you should probably turn around.
- Chaos along with skill is a necessity on any long VOC trip.

Trip Highlights:

- The two page document of iconic Lucas quotes (will not add more for fear of blackmail to our amazing VOC president).
- Amazing views and a pretty chill time.
- Chaos on Kulshan.

### Left

Lucas going the wrong way  
*Stefanija Rekasius*

### Right

Em and the shwack  
*Stefanija Rekasius*



## An Almost Epic on Garibaldi Lake

*Anton Afanassiev*

There was a bit of a ventilation problem at Burton Hut (aka Sphinx Hut). It seems we did too good a job sealing gaps and insulating the hut. Knowing this, John Sherk and I started scheming a workhike to add a vent. Finding a date for this was tricky, but eventually, we settled on the weekend of May 3rd, while the lake was still frozen. A touch late for a lake crossing, but there had been many positive reports in the past week. Kathleen Griffin had some time off during the week, so we decided to make the workhike more of a thing. We would start on Brohm Ridge, tackle Nch'kay, and then meet with John and company at the hut to do the work.

After driving most of the way up the Brohm Ridge Forest Service Road, Kat and I started skinning at a pleasant time. It was easy skinning, though the sun was baking us. We reached the Brohm pinnacle in the late afternoon. After dodging some crusty avalanche debris below it, we crossed under the pinnacle safely. We gained the ridge next to the glacier and set up camp in a relatively snow-free spot. What we should have realized is that there was no snow there because the wind had blown it all away. As the sun set, the winds started gusting to 50+ kph. Despite extensive efforts to set up the camp, we realized we had to move it, or our tent would blow away. By now, the sun had basically set. We managed to find a reasonably sheltered wind lip, which we dug a platform into. The tent got set up, and gear was carried down. The snow had gotten quite icy by this point. Kat went to get the last bit of gear and plopped it down on the slope next to the tent. Unfortunately, it was a bit too icy for that, and half her splitboard went flying into the dark down the glacier. The mission had fundamentally changed.

Knowing John was off-work the next day, we inReached him and asked him to come up the ridge with snowshoes if I couldn't find the splitboard the next day. It seemed unlikely I'd find it, so I figured this made sense. The

next morning, I got up at sunrise and skied down the glacier in the last known direction of the splitboard. I reached a steep roll and deemed it unwise to solo ski further, especially with no sign of the splitboard. I started traversing to find a good place to skin up. Then, to my surprise, I spotted it. The board was sitting on a 30-degree slope, holding on by a nubbin of ice that had caught on the binding. I gingerly skied under it, worried that any snow I would dislodge from above would knock it down all the way to Ring Creek. I grabbed it and stuffed it into my bag. After an unpleasant transition on the steep and icy slope, I skinned back to camp.

We inReached John and told him to call off the snowshoe rescue. We would meet him back at the hut. John said that there were poor condition reports from the lake and that they were considering approaching at night and leaving at night. We said that we would investigate and report in. First mistake, we should have asked John for more info. It was too late for Garibaldi, and we were quite tired already, so we set off across the Warren Glacier towards the hut. As we started climbing, we realized that we had left Kat's shovel blade at camp. Kat was buying a new shovel anyway, so we decided not to go back for it. Second mistake. This mistake was made easy by our being tired and assuming we would have no more avalanche terrain to cross. I bet it's long buried by now, but if anyone happens to be doing Garibaldi or up around Brohm ridge, we would appreciate it if you took a look at 49.86025, -123.01918 for the blade. The handle has since been donated to the VOC and is lonely.

**Left** Measuring the ice thickness using a screw. *Kathleen Griffin*

**Right** Our campsite at sunset. Before the winds picked up. *Anton Afanassiev*





After some uneventful skinning, we reached the glaciology huts and got our first look at the lake. Still looked frozen. After some careful first steps onto the lake, the top layer of snow was deemed supportive. To be cautious, I cut through the snow layer, past the slush, and used an ice screw to get the ice depth. 2.5 inches was the smallest measurement I got. Mostly it was over 3 inches. Not great, but seemed fine on skis, especially given the supportive crust on top. Still, we steered well clear of creeks and the shore as we made our way towards the hut. After reaching the hut, we reported the ice reading to John. Out of caution, he decided to call off the workhike. We then decided to take it easy for the rest of the day, nap, and get ready for

### *Top to bottom*

- 1** Returning with the splitboard.  
*Kathleen Griffin*
- 2** Finally coming down the trail.  
*Kathleen Griffin*
- 3** A short and steep bushwack.  
*Kathleen Griffin*

the way out tomorrow.

I couldn't quite sleep. It was hot, way too hot. I kept wondering what effect this would have on the ice. So, in the evening I went to take readings. Before I even stepped on the ice, things seemed off. The Sphinx Bay entrance had grown five times larger over the course of the day, and the small creeks that had been frozen were now flowing. My first step revealed another problem: the snow layer had turned fully into a slush layer, offering no support. Finally, the more worrying part was that the ice depth had decreased to only 1.5 inches. That is over an inch of loss in one day! I could now punch my ice axe through the ice in two swings. As it was a cloudy day tomorrow, there would be no refreeze tonight. The lake was out of the question.

We were now in a pickle. We couldn't cross the lake, and both routes out from the hut (Gentian Pass or Sphinx Pass) involved crossing avalanche terrain with our now insufficient avalanche gear. We had seen evidence of a natural avalanche cycle from the recent heat that did not seem finished. Additionally, it looked like the weather was moving in, so there was a possibility of a whiteout the next day. This seemed like a pileup of circumstances that could lead to a very bad situation. The InReach came in handy here. We had some idea of how to do the Gentian Pass route, but didn't want to attempt it in bad weather. We asked John to contact search and rescue (SAR) just so they knew something would be up if we didn't check in (turns out it's hard to reach SAR, so this didn't actually happen). Then, we conferred with him about the best options. He consulted with Jacob Grossbard, Haley Foladare, and Jeff Mottershead. Then, he suggested waiting an extra day at the hut for good weather, and then exiting via Gentian. He would meet us at Panorama Ridge. With Jacob's input, John sent us waypoints to enter into our maps. With Jacob's waypoints and better weather, enough confounding variables were off the table so that we felt confident that we could make our exit if we waited a day at the hut.

The next day was quite relaxed, given the circumstances. We had plenty of food as there were still leftovers from the construction project at the hut. If you visit the hut, help yourself. To kill time, we did some hut improvement. Notably, we moved the bookshelf over so you could see the books and also not hit your head on it when exiting the sleeping platform. We also added some barriers to the sleeping area upstairs so you can't roll off into the ladder hole. Finally, I plugged some gaps that I had missed during the original construction. I also realized that the timer for the lights was broken and needs to be manually turned off lest it drain the battery. I think this has been fixed since then, but if not, shoot me, or the VOC info email a report! We made a rice curry and headed off for an early sleep so we could get an early start the next day.

We rose before dawn and started off. We contoured around the lake shore until we found a good spot to head up towards Gentian Pass. After a short, steep, bushwacky bootpack, we were in open terrain and were able

to start skinning. The snow was firm, and travel was easy. The steepest bit involved travelling up a gulley towards the pass. Kat transitioned to bootpacking, while I skinned on. We decided that tackling the pass directly would put us under cornices. Instead, we headed up the ridge to the glacier. There wasn't much snow on the ridge, and we had to bootpack. However, the views around us were stunning. The landscape was probably the best of the trip so far.

After cresting the ridge, we were able to transition and ski the glacier down. It was probably some of the best turns of the season. It had snowed a few inches of powder overnight onto a firm crust. We toured around the south side of Cinder Cone, trying to stay out of creeks. By this time, it was very hot again, and the snow had turned to slush, leading to some tricky sidehilling. There were some huge cornices hanging off Panorama Ridge that we didn't want to be under. Think 15+ meters in size. So, we crossed some creeks and chose a safe way to get up to the Panorama Ridge hiking trail. By this time, John had let us know he had spotted us and had brought his friend Jason Galbraith with him. We told him to feel free to summit while we had lunch.

We met up. John had graciously brought candy and Coca-Cola for us. We had a small feast and skied down together. It was easy going. John and I skied as far as possible down the switchbacks, while Kat and Jason decided to transition in the meadows. Theirs was a more pleasant walk; ours was a more exhilarating ski. Eventually, we met back up at the fork in the trail and bootpacked down to the cars. I was thankful to have brought my speedcrosses for this.

Overall, things turned out fairly well. We made a number of mistakes. Had we made more, things could have gotten much worse than having an extra day at a nice hut. We ended up recognizing our mistakes and mitigating them, but that doesn't always happen. Having Ben's inreach to talk with our friends in town was very useful for our decision-making. Moral of the story: do some measurements for yourself before you cross the lake in late spring, don't set up camp in the windy spots, and don't leave your gear behind.

## Editor's Note

**G**ood morning, it is 5:56 am as I am writing this- sitting at my half-lit desk. Beside me are three different VOCJ editions from previous years and with me is my all-nighter snack of choice (potatoes, thanks Bill). As you read this on the printed out version of the journal, it will be March 26th 2026 (or later) and this journal will have arrived in your hands.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work on this complete undertaking of a project. Although I would like to acknowledge and express my unending gratitude to the tremendous support I have received through this admittedly whirlwind of a process. First to Sri, who graciously offered to take care of the Photo Contest this year. Alex and Sonia, two wonderful former Journal Editors who readily answered my many questions in a pinch. Ann-Cathrin (AC), thank you for your help editing an abundance of articles.

To Duncan, Yanjie (Cloud), Elizabeth, Eden, Thomas, Tristan, Sean, Juliane, John, Aaron, Julia, Ivan, Shravan, Hannah, Lucas, Ava, Allen, and Ignatius- your editing help was truly appreciated, whether it was a few hours in the clubroom or reaching out offering to take a few articles on even though you may be far. To Diego, thank you for spending many hours helping me with inDesign faff and for your support. Finally, to everyone who submitted articles, thank you for allowing me to sort your pictures and stories into little boxes and pages to be shared with the world. It was truly an honour.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tra Mi', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

*Tra Mi*