

Friends of Strathcona Park
Newsletter - Fall 2012
Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5
www.friendsofstrathcona.org

Hike in the Bedwell
By Ken vande Burgt

On 29 August 2012, 11 people and I went on a hike in the Bedwell Valley. We hiked from the Alpine to the Sea on the route that has been cleared or marked by FOSP over the past two years.

The trip actually started in Courtenay. Another group of 12 was going to hike from the Sea via Tofino to the Alpine. We swapped cars with the intention of swapping keys midway through the hike. There was quiet pandemonium as 22 people found seats and space for packs in the vehicles. Kel will tell you the hardest part of organizing such a trip was to ensure that there were enough vehicles at each end.

We got to the start of the Bedwell Lake trail at about 11:00. The goal for the day was the lower flats along the Bedwell River not far below K2 creek.



View from the new FOSP trail in the Lower Bedwell
photo by Sharon Haave

The trail going uphill to the Bedwell Lakes is one of the most highly developed and best maintained in the Park. The steel ladders impressed us and we were even more impressed that the handrails had been bent over by the snow load. As we made our way up, the weather closed in and threatened rain.

When we got to the Bedwell Lakes site with its tent pads, lake views, and most



Crossing K2 Creek

photo by Sharon Haave

importantly, an outhouse, we seriously considered ending our day here. But no, four days of hiking meant spreading out the distances. In order to make day two less strenuous we carried on another two hours to the lower flats as planned.

K2 creek is a rushing cascade of water that thunders into the Bedwell River down a narrow channel. The bridge crossing is made of two yellow cedar logs and, as it is getting noticeably older, will need to be changed out sooner than later. It's easy enough to walk across the K2 Bridge but the roaring creek below is intimidating.

Some of us walked, and some of us straddled the bridge and crept across. We all took care to get across safely and were relieved to have this obstacle behind us.

After stopping briefly at Doran Falls, one of several spectacular cascades to be found along this trail, we continued on to our campsite.

The campsite at the lower flats is pleasant with good areas to set a tent. The river is close at hand providing white noise and water. It started raining as people finished their meals; welcome to the rain forest. Fortunately this is good ground for camping and nothing important got wet.

On day two we hiked from the lower flats to Ashwood Creek. A highlight was crossing the remnants of snow at the bottom of an avalanche chute. We went on through varied forest and eventually met up with the end of the old logging road. We followed the old road to You Creek where we had lunch. We forded the knee-deep creek rather than risk the single log crossing.

The flora that we passed through coming down the trail from the alpine was fascinating. Every hundred meters of elevation change brought us into a different ecosystem. The trees, shrubs,



The alpine to ocean group. A similar group hiked the opposite direction.

photo by Sharon Haaave

and late blooming flowers, yielded seemingly unending variety.

Walking the road under an arch of new growth alder gets tedious. But even along the road there are highlights. At one point we stopped for a break and walked out onto the open riverbank that ran beside the road. There we were astonished to have a fantastic view of Big Interior Mountain as it rose up from the junction of You Creek and the Bedwell River.

We finished our walk to our next camp at Ashwood Creek. Somewhat later the group going from the Sea to the Alpine arrived. Happily we were all able to find a relatively flat spot on which to pitch a tent. This excellent campsite is a large open area on gravel along the bank of Ashwood Creek with views of Mariner

Mountain. After camp chores were done we had a couple of hours to intermingle and socialize with both groups. The all-important key exchange was made.

Day three was our longest day. We started by hiking the route from Ashwood Creek to Sam Craig Creek. The route follows a branch creek from Ashwood Creek to a notch where it follows a branch creek down to the mouth of Blaney Creek. It then follows the Bedwell River to Sam Craig Creek. It's hard to imagine a better route to hike this section. Hopefully BC Parks will allow us to clear this section of the route so it is easier to follow.

From Sam Craig creek the trail that was

cleared by FOSP two years ago continues on to where it joins the old road near the living bridge. Lunch at Sam Craig was followed by two hours of undulating trail to a beach near two-flag creek. After a good break there we hiked to the bluffs where good views of Mariner Mountain and Big Interior are to be had. From there we dropped steeply to a campsite on the old road near the living bridge.

After a day of spectacular vistas we were somewhat disappointed with the dreary new growth forest that we camped in. There was no choice as we had time constraints to catch the water taxi on day four. Perhaps future trips should allow 5 days allowing a camp on the beach near two-flag and another at Gayle McGee bridge.

The living bridge is an old log bridge that crosses a spectacular 70-foot wide canyon some 100 feet above the Bedwell River. It was built of huge tree trunks and covered with gravel to provide a road for logging trucks and mining traffic. Today the bridge is covered in trees and shrubs; hence its name. It's been 'closed' for several years as there is no way to assess the safety of the bridge. There is no way to cross the river at this location without a substantial bridge.

The visit to the living bridge highlighted the advantage of the

FOSP route and trail we followed. No major bridge is required above the Gayle McGee Bridge; there is no valid reason to keep the trail closed. It is long past due for BC Parks to build a new bridge at the living bridge site (unlikely due to cost) or abandon the road on the true right bank and allow FOSP to complete the trail on the true left bank.

On day four we packed up our tents and hiked to Bedwell Sound. There was an obstacle right at the start where we crossed the remnants of an old debris clogged bridge, dipped down into the slippery creek bottom that bypasses the bridge, and then climbed back up to the road and over a huge fallen tree.

The next obstacle was a creek bed that required quite a bit of work to get down and up the other side. This area is essentially a wide debris torrent through which the creek shifts around every hundred years or so. Needless to say there are only remnants of the bridge works that once crossed here.

Fortunately at this time of year the creek itself was quite easy to cross; it's just the large loose rock on either bank that causes difficulty.

We stopped at Gayle McGee Bridge for a long break as we had some extra time now before the water taxi would arrive. We spent an hour finishing our snacks

and with one soul brave enough to try the chill waters for a swim.

From Gayle McGee Bridge the road is maintained to carry vehicles from the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort. It took about two hours to walk from Gayle McGee Bridge to the dock where we met the water taxi. On the way we passed a friendly group of horse riders from the resort.

The water taxi arrived exactly on time and carried us to the end of our trip in Tofino.

Everyone found their vehicles. We went to a local restaurant to share one final meal together before we made our way home.

Legal Report

FOSP does not support the decision made by BC Parks in granting Clayoquot Wilderness Resort a permit for horse use in the lower Bedwell Valley. We are contesting this public Use Permit (PUP) by taking legal action against BC Parks. We do not believe that in granting this permit BC Parks met their legislative requirements.

We are now in the midst of the legal battle. We have received Response affidavits from the Ministry and are deep in reading and considering how to reply. The hearing is scheduled for February 4th to 8th in Vancouver. Our lawyer is Scott Bernstein.

Comox Lake Park

A few months ago the Wilderness Committee (formerly known as the Western Canada Wilderness Committee) initiated a move to increase the amount of protected area in the province. Part of this process was a meeting held in Courtenay, organized by the Comox Valley Conservation Strategy and facilitated by David Stapley. About 20 local groups are represented in this organization, and FOSP is one of them.

Since then there have been a series of meetings held working towards a proposal for protecting the Comox Lake Watershed. The form of this protection is still being worked on, but part of it would include an expansion of Strathcona Park.

What is really interesting about this movement is that it includes many stakeholder groups not normally on the same page when it comes to protection. Groups being consulted (other than FOSP) include the Fish and Game Club, mountain bikers, horse riders, cabin owners, hunters and fishermen, ATV and snowmobile operators and dirt biker riders. Economic benefits could be realized through improved protection of drinking water reducing

the need for additional water treatment plants. We expect local governments to find this an attractive element of the proposal.

This report should be coming to the public for feedback before too long. Keep an eye out for it.

SPPAC

The last Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee meeting was held on October 19th.

Ivor McWilliams and Robert Behrendt representing the mine in the Park, now officially renamed Nyrstar Myra Falls Ltd., gave a lengthy presentation about what has been happening over the last year and what is planned for the future.

They were optimistic about the future of the mine. Expectations are that employment will increase to about 400 from 287. Work has been done on closure plans and reclamation plans. The reclamation bond which now stands at \$38.3 million will be increased to \$70 million within three years.

There was some discussion about improving access around Jim Mitchell Lake. This will be looked into.

On October 5th there was a spill of about 300 L of slurry, some of which got into Myra Creek. This was cleaned up and a

pipe clamp which had broken was removed and replaced with a welded repair.

The three Park Use Permits the mine has operated under since the late 1960's were replaced with two new ones of 20 year terms.

A lot of work has been done on improving the berm containing the mine tailings. Clean fill is being mined behind the old core racks to be used to cover tailings. The shortage of clean fill is what will determine the life expectancy of the mine.

SPPAC also discussed how to be more effective, and how to include the general public more effectively in its deliberations.

Access to the Park through private lands was revisited. This is an ongoing problem due to uncooperative timber companies and deteriorating logging roads.

Parks spent \$65,000 in the Park this season. A bridge was replaced in Paradise Meadows, a new toilet was installed at Battleship Lake and some boardwalks were replaced.

The Heber Diversion pipe has been removed and the site is to be reclaimed

next year. Some work has been done along the Della Falls trail, some on the Ranger cabin near Hairtrigger Lake, and some near Baby Bedwell Lake

It's great to see Parks carrying out this maintenance this year.

Mick Taylor from Gold River has joined SPPAC as a new member. He has extensive knowledge of the Park especially along the west side, and should be a valuable member.

SWI

The Strathcona Wilderness Institute (SWI) is FOSP's sister organization. It was set up by FOSP a number of years ago in order to educate the public in Park affairs. It has grown very successful over the years and taken on a life of its own. Steve Smith has been its driving force, and now Krista Kaptein has taken on a main leadership role.

SWI runs both the Visitors' Center, officially called the Strathcona Park Wilderness Center, at Mount Washington Resort and the Buttle Lake Information Hut staffed voluntarily by Gerry Roberts. Many interpretive programs are run from the Mount Washington location, and Gerry gives out valuable information at Buttle Lake.

The 2012 season has been very successful recording over 10,000 visits to the SPWC facilities. An interesting comparison takes place with the new Vancouver Island Visitors' Center near the Cumberland interchange where 10,000 visitors were counted in 4 1/2 months from January to June. SWI's 10,000 took only 3 1/2 months to achieve the same with volunteer staff at a fraction of the cost.

The majority of Wilderness Center visitors this year were from Vancouver Island, however those from other countries represented 41 different nations.

Funding for SWI comes from a combination of donations from those participating in guided walks and hikes, funding from the Mountain Equipment Co-op, and sales of various items and funding from B.C. Parks.

The find out more about SWI or to make a donation to help them with their work go to:

<http://strathconapark.org/>

Gerry Roberts Turns 75

The Friends would like to wish Gerry a happy birthday. As stated above, Gerry has manned the information hut at Buttle Narrows for over a decade. He volunteers for the Strathcona Wilderness Institute and is steadfast in his service to the public. He always donates his expenses back to SWI, and also makes frequent generous donations to FOSP. His outstanding effort is much appreciated by all of us in both organizations as well as countless members of the public who he has directed to appropriate places in the Park, sometimes saving them potential harm by avoiding trips they are not prepared for or not suited for.



Ron Quilter is Retiring

After a long and successful career with B.C. Parks dating back to service as a backcountry ranger in Strathcona Park in the 1970's, Ron is taking a well deserved retirement in early December. We will miss him as he was always a good person to deal with. FOSP may not always agree with what B.C. Parks has done, but Ron was always a person who we felt was honest, respectful and had the best interests of the Park at heart. We wish him well and hope he enjoys the opportunities he has planned for hiking in various exotic places.

We also wish Ron a speedy and full recovery from an unfortunate accident he

had recently. While riding his bike along Miracle Beach Drive on his way to work a van pulled out of a driveway and sent Ron flying. We're told he has a broken collarbone, several broken ribs, and many bruises. We're sure with his high level of physical fitness, Ron will be fully recovered before too long. What a way to prepare for retirement!

Fundraising Appeal

Again, we're hoping you will renew your membership and hopefully find a bit extra to help out. FOSP is in pretty good shape due to generous member donations over the last few years, but is expecting some major expenses from our court case in February. Five days in court doesn't come cheap, so whatever you can spare will be much appreciated.

FOSP Membership Form Thank you for renewing.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **alternate phone (cell)** _____

e-mail _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

Donation (tax receipts for anything over \$25). _____

Comments _____

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