

NV Summer Camp at Smithers Driftwood Lodge

by Marian Coope, with contributions from Elly Brok, Cynthia Crampton, Paula Burgerjohn, Daryl Sturdy, Eva Nagy and Lesley Bohm

27 July—10 August 2008

After two successive alpine venues it was time for a drive-in camp to allow a greater range of Nature Vancouver members to attend. The Camp Committee investigated many possible sites and finally picked Smithers Driftwood Lodge, a family-run Bed and Breakfast owned by a young couple, Gabi and Norbert Gust. It was the only place that would permit the majority of us to camp in tents on their property while providing meals for ourselves. We were to bring our own food and cook (Jane Taylor, as in previous years), but use the lodge's dining room for eating, and kitchen for food preparation, with our own stove, set up on the balcony, for the actual cooking. With no need to set up our two big tents, and shelter

and warmth when the weather was bad, it all worked out extremely well. Two camps were held in the two-week period of our stay.

The lodge, a large, handsome log building with a red roof, in a style not uncommon away from our cities, provided six comfortable bedrooms for those who did not want to tent. The majority of campers pitched their tents in a long, grassy field that sloped gently up behind the lodge. The slope and the tiny wild rosebushes concealed by the grass were the only drawbacks to the site. With three portable toilets at the lower end and a wash station, camp was established. Cars were parked beside the driveway, an area we might have disregarded except that that was where the Mountain Bluebirds lived.

The lodge was surrounded by a garden set in a 114-acre property on rising ground some eight km northeast of the town of Smithers. Surrounded by fields, the house had an uninterrupted view across the valley to the 2,331-m-high Hudson Bay Mountain. The little town of Smithers at its base was not visible; nothing but hay fields, clumps of trees and a distant farmhouse surrounded us, with a bear daily crossing the field



*Smithers Driftwood Lodge, looking SW beyond the Telkwa Mountains to the Howson Range.
Photo by Marian Coope.*



*Rosamund Pojar leads a botany trip.
Photo by Ian Cumming.*

below the garden to make us feel we weren't so distant from wilderness camping after all.

Smithers is in the Bulkley Valley. In her usual trenchant way, Elly Brok summed up the state of mind of many of us: "I thought the Bulkley Valley was very beautiful. I had always heard it mentioned on the weather station and never knew where it was exactly. Apart from going to a great camp, I also got to explore new areas within B.C." The Bulkley Valley is about 1,150 km by road north of Vancouver and approximately halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert. It is indeed beautiful: a broad valley of rolling agricultural land, watered

by rivers and lakes, and set among snow-capped mountains that surround but do not dominate it. The nearby Babine range, Hudson Bay Mountain, and to the southwest, the Telkwa and Bulkley ranges were the main objects of our hikes.

We were most hospitably received. Our President, Cynthia Crampton wrote in the Vancouver Naturalist, "The Bulkley Valley Naturalists (BVN) welcomed us to the area, took us to places we might not have found on our own, and in the evenings, showed us slides of the area, and generally were available as resource people. Many thanks to Jane Hoek, Rosamund and Jim Pojar, Evi and Mel Coulson, Alec Deas and others for botany, birding and hiking trips." Members of the BVN were at our disposal for both weeks. Large numbers of campers were delighted to have Rosamund Pojar lead them on botanical trips to Hudson Bay Mountain for the wildflowers and to the Community Forest with its giant black cottonwoods. Cynthia's account continued: "Jane Hoek, President of the BVN, took us on a birding trip, which included a lunch stop at her home on Tyee Lake. Most



*Hudson Bay Mountain, seen from the Lyon/McCabe Trail.
Photo by Ian Cumming.*



The "sherpas" carrying packs from cars to lodge.

Photo by Ian Cumming.

of us spent it relaxing on the dock, having just seen American Redstarts (a first for many of us) on the driveway. The sun was shining, the loons were calling, the dragonflies were flitting... suddenly I heard from the rear, "Why can't our President have a spread like this that we can come to?" Sigh!"

The first hike for some was up spectacular Hudson Bay Mountain's south peak, while for many others it was to the nearby Malkow Lookout knoll, a small protrusion amid hayfields, full of birds and the typical vegetation of the region, including a small conifer with a full set of Christmas decorations on it, apparently a local joke. After the knoll, hikers went on to see the petroglyphs. Cynthia wrote of them, "We were dismayed to witness families chiselling out the ancient fossils at Driftwood Canyon Provincial Park, despite specific signs forbidding this. We will join with the BVN in doing what we can to put a stop to this vandalism." She has been told since, however, that originally the land was decided to the municipality in order to allow people to try their hand at

finding fossils. Nobody, including the donor, knew then that the finds were important, and clearly it is difficult to stop the vandalism now, although attempts are being made. We hope they succeed.

Other hikes followed. Elly Brok wrote, "On Harvey Mountain [in the Babine Mountains], there was a lot of white lichen growing. The very blue monkshood flower was growing out of this lichen. It was a treat to the eye. On Hudson Bay Mountain there were so many gentians I had never seen before. Also [when out with Jane Hoek], I saw foxes I had never seen at other camps." Then there were various hikes along the McCabe and Lyon Creek trails, including the 22-km round trip over both trails, and ascents of Mount Harvey. On another occasion, on the Hankin Plateau, Kate Hill lost her camera. Three days later, on the last day of camp, Bill Ramey went up and found it, to everyone's delight.

In Camp 2, we had a family group: Dave Morris and Paula Burgerjon brought their sons, Rowan, aged 10 and Arley, aged 8. The whole family hiked, explored the petroglyphs and went horseback riding, and the children were delighted to find that our hosts also had two children of very much the same age, Sarah and Philip. After the day's hikes, the four of them played together – on the trampoline, and running a "taxi" or "sherpa" service, that is, carrying people's packs and equipment out to their cars in a cart, for which they might receive a tip. It was a real pleasure to have them among us. Paula had this to say about the family experience:

Family Nature Camp 2008

by Paula Burgerjon (Week 2)

I had a few small doubts as we packed up an eight-year-old who has been known to refuse to move on a hike and a ten-year-old who seldom sits still long enough to look at a flower. Just the two of them together can be so noisy that hearing a bird sing would be out of the question. To add to my worries - a VERY long drive in order to attend a camp at which there would be no other child campers.

However, it was my idea.

As it turned out, we loved the food, Sarah and Philip and their chickens, the mountain goats, the marmots, fellow campers, the flowers and the birds (not in that order, except for the food).

We didn't like the port-a-potties much, but the surrounding stunning scenery made up for it.

I especially liked escaping from my family for a couple of strenuous and very rewarding hikes. Many kind people related to me how lovely it was to have my boys with them on their hikes—hard to believe since these same boys can be less-than-lovely to their mother.

I learned that my husband is definitely not a worrier. He was fast asleep while his wife was absent—out in the mountains, overdue, after dark and with three men.... Oh, never mind.

We are grateful to everyone for making us feel welcome and will treasure our memories of this camp for many years to come.

* * *

One hike had those in the Lodge on tenterhooks for much of an evening:

Late for Dinner: a Trip up The Galleon

by Daryl Sturdy (Week 2)

We were very late. The four of us— Rich Sobel, Peter Cawsey, Paula Burgerjon and I—had had a long day's hike into Babine Mountains Provincial Park, and it was 10 p.m. before we got back to the lodge. We had finally gotten out of the bush and onto the logging road around 9, but ahead of us was a 40 minutes' fast walk back to the car and my cell phone before we could let them know at the lodge that we were OK. I was concerned about how Lee, David Foreman our Camp Manager, and the others would be feeling with us several hours overdue. But there was no cell phone coverage.

When we finally drove back to the lodge, we found they had all been discussing whom to call if we didn't turn up. Jane, bless her heart, had left dinner for us. It was fortunate for Peter that Lee was there, as he'd gotten a bad gash on his leg after arguing with a sharp rock in a boulder field. Lee was able to use her nursing training to treat the wound until he could see a doctor in the morning.

Knowing it was going to be a long day, we had left at 8 a.m. for the parking area. From there it was a very pleasant walk over the 8 km of old logging road to the trailhead near the handsome Joe L'Orsa cabin in the Silver King Basin. We saw many of the flowers that we'd seen at Rosamund Pojar's presentation the night before.

After having a look inside the cabin, we walked the few metres back to the trailhead and started up the slope towards the bowl in the distance that would lead us

to our mountain, The Galleon. At 2,340 m, we had an elevation gain of about 900 m ahead of us. We couldn't have asked for a more beautiful day, warm with a perfectly blue sky.

Rich had gotten the idea of doing the hike from a local whom he contacted via the Internet. We had a rough idea of where to go and since we were out in the open, it was just a matter of finding the best route to the summit. As we got closer to the final slope to the summit, the views became ever more awesome. There were two lakes in the bowl. We walked alongside a stream that ran clear over a bed covered with a white deposit that gave the water a pearly lustre. On returning to Vancouver, I consulted David Cook, our resident geologist, as to the nature of the white substance on the rocks in the stream. Of the four possibilities he outlined, I think the best choice is that it was a white biofilm consisting of filamentous bacteria with zinc sulphide deposited in their protective sheaths. The zinc sulphide mineral sphalerite is often associated with silver in western Canada, so this is a distinct possibility in the Silver King area.

The climb up the final slope was steep, with high-angle talus to traverse. We crossed it very carefully, not wanting to start an avalanche or take a tumble. The last hundred metres elevation was a scramble up some tricky rock. This added to the adrenalin rush of the climb.

It was a relief to get over the worst of it and hike up the last bit of slope to the summit, which was broad and relatively flat. We had our lunch and enjoyed the 360-degree vistas. We were on time, with

a more leisurely hike ahead of us, down the Danny Thomas Basin, one watershed over. We had been told there would be easy descents via some snowfields. Rich and I, with our long pants, bumslid down a lot of them, Peter and Paula, in shorts, descended in a more traditional fashion. As the snow ran out, we continued down the basin, picking our way around ridges, following, we thought, the directions Rich's contact had given us. It was new country, the views were incredible and we still had lots of time.

It wasn't until we got down to a creek and the tree line that we started to think it was not going to be as easy any more. We were supposed to pick up a flagged trail near the creek. We didn't find one.

We picked our way through boulder fields and krumholtz getting more and more concerned that even though we knew where we had to get to, getting there was becoming problematic. At one point, Rich decided to go down closer to the creek, even though it meant bushwhacking. Paula followed and saw, on the other side of the creek, some flagging marking the trail. Relief is a piece of red plastic ribbon!

By this time, the shadows were getting longer and I wondered if we'd make it to where the trail intersected the road before it got too dark to see our way. As we got closer to the road, the trail became better defined and we could travel more quickly. When we reached the road, twilight had arrived but all that remained was to hoof it down the 5 or 6 km to the car.

. . .

Campers from both weeks described one hike, which impressed all of them in ways good and bad:

The Ridge Walk Above the Microwave Tower, and the “Mud-Boggers”

by Eva Nagy (Week 2)

It was a long, treacherously muddy drive to the microwave tower, where we parked our cars. As we set out on the walk along the ridge we were well rewarded for our efforts. Whole valleys filled with pink fireweed lay below us, and above the microwave tower, the most spectacular and diverse alpine flower meadows stretched endlessly ahead. Great clusters of blue-white and blue-pink arctic lupine alternated with bird’s-beak lousewort, massed in a way we had never seen before. But mostly it was a colourful mixture of fleabane, valerian, two kinds of paintbrush, and lupine, edged with a carpet of partridgefoot and sibalidia. Among the sub-alpine firs we even found some red bearberry (*Arcostaphylos rubra*), and we had lunch in the most delightful white heather meadows. In the swampy areas near the ponds, there were leatherleaf saxifrage, white marsh-marigold, (now in fruit), and river beauty. The variety was endless... and to see it being destroyed by some thoughtless ATV users was heartbreaking.

by Lesley Bohm (Week 1)

One of the places we visited, the microwave area, had the most

beautiful display of flowers anywhere, but we were aghast to see the hundred-foot-long and road-width mud-holes made by the local “mud-boggers,” as they call themselves, right in the middle of flower meadows. These quad users are either ignorant of the damage they are causing, or simply don’t care. I wrote a letter to several ministries in government on our return, and received a reply on October 28th from Bill Bennett of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. The government realizes the seriousness of the situation and has



*Damage caused by “mud-boggers.” Foreground: fireplace.
Background: ATV treads.
Photo by Bob Holden.*

increased the fine for destruction to \$100,000. Closer to home, similar damage has been reported near Whistler, and a warning sign has been put up at Phelix Creek in the Lower Mainland. Unfortunately, it is difficult to catch the culprits in the act, so everyone must keep their eyes peeled and report any infractions to Forestry or to the RCMP.

* * *

On behalf of Nature Vancou-

ver, our President has written a letter supporting the BVN's concerns. Let's hope all these actions will help the BVN in its struggle to make citizens more aware of the destruction they are causing in their beautiful area.

The last set of expeditions that must be recorded were those to Moricetown, Hazelton and Kispiox, some kilometres north of Smithers. Moricetown is on the banks of the Bulkley River at a narrow gorge where for untold generations, the First Nations inhabitants had fished for salmon. Many years ago, the government, attempting to widen the river with explosives, effectively ruined the fisheries, and fish ladders had to be built to restore the passage of the salmon. We watched a few very large fish being caught in enormous nets on both sides of the river, and enjoyed conversations with some Wet'suwet'en people who were looking forward to a visit to Vancouver. Continuing on to Hazelton, at the confluence of the Bulkley and Skeena rivers,



*Weeping totem at Kispiox.
Photo by Elly Brok.*

we visited 'Ksan, the reconstructed village built by the Gitksan and others to promote local culture. The chief attractions are the totem poles and a row of traditional houses containing splendid artefacts. These were shown to us in a series of performances that explained some of the traditions of the Gitksan people. North of Hazelton, Kispiox, another Gitksan village, has an impressive array of totem poles. These visits, made by many of us, were a necessary part of our getting to know the natural history of the area; without them, we would have missed an important element of life in the Bulkley Valley.

To Norbert and Gabi Gust who so generously and cheerfully shared their house with us—especially to Gabi, who often assisted Jane with the cooking—we owe a great debt of gratitude. As always, Jane fed us magnifi-



*Ksan village.
Photo by Elly Brok.*



Camp manager David Foreman bids farewell to Gabi Gust and cooks Jane and Olida.

Photo by Ian Cumming.

cently, this year with the help of Olida Boudreau, leaving us all satisfied and content. Above all, we are grateful to the Camp Committee: Hugh Hamilton, Elly Brok, David Foreman, Bill Kinkaid, Nigel Peck, Helen Gowans, Ian McAskill, Fred Hornby and their chair Kitty Castle, for the truly excellent organization of the camp. Although they unfairly provided better weather for the second week than for the first, they did a splendid job. We thank them all.

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