

Nature Vancouver Summer 2003 Camp at Ghost Peak

by Kate Pierce and Al Payne

with contributions from Marion Boyle and Ming Louie,

compiled by Marian Coope

Kate Pierce: With the serious forest fire situation in southern B.C., I was concerned the camp might be cancelled, so it was good to meet everyone at the Revelstoke airport and realize we really would depart for Ghost Peak, to the southeast of the city. The brief helicopter flight was, as always, a highlight and so was the first view of our beautiful alpine bowl with three small lakes, each a different shade of green or blue, and a swift stream running through the campsite. Ghost Peak towered above us to the north and acted as a sentinel whenever we were hiking around the surrounding ridges and peaks. Setting up the big tents, waterline and biffies, choosing the perfect tent site, signing up for chores and settling in for the week completed the first day.

Al Payne: The camp was unique in two ways. First, there were no hiking trails in the area whatsoever. And second, none of the trips in the area had been reconnoitered prior to deciding on the site. As I was responsible for coordinating the trips, this was somewhat worrisome but knowledgeable locals assured us that the area was great for hiking. As it turned out, the area was fairly rugged. Those participants who preferred easy rambles found the area somewhat confining. They could not go far in any direction without getting into steep or rough terrain.

After dinner on Sunday, and before the dining tent was securely anchored down, we were visited by a violent windstorm, which came very close to destroying the large tent. Despite significant damage to the supporting pipe frames, we managed to get the tent back up and functioning. Serious damage was also done to Lance Weissner's tent (very important as he was camp cook), which was finally repaired by Bob Holden. We considered ourselves fortunate not to have any more high winds. That night, however, we had a terrifying electrical storm. I lay in the dark in my tent, with the rain and hail making a great din on the fly, waiting for the inevitable brilliant flash of light and the crash of thunder coming much too soon after. How long would the bad weather continue? Would we survive the week?

Kate Pierce: Those early storms made us appreciate how lucky we were to have sunshine for the rest of the week. Day hikes to Ghost Peak, Mt. McKenzie meadows, Sonia Lake (named by us after Sonia Ward, who first found it) and all the ridges surrounding our alpine bowl kept me busy all week, with mountain goats sighted on the rock faces, a large variety of alpine flowers including the spectacular glacier lily, many birds and beautiful rocks. A ridge southeast of the camp, which Lorne Payne, Robert Bear, Garry Atchison and I explored towards the end of the week had been staked for lead and zinc mineral rights and was a massive jumble of broken rocks. More ambitious parties climbed Mt. McKenzie, Ghost Peak, and Mt. Cartier. On the last day, Sonia Ward guided a group of less experienced hikers up Ghost Peak and they were all seen proudly standing on the top.

Al Payne: There was some confusion at first about the location of the true Ghost Peak. We believe that the map maker incorrectly labeled the slightly lower peak about a kilometer to the east as Ghost Peak. We might call this the Alleged Ghost Peak. The true and highest peak is the one we could all see looming up north of camp. It proved to be a short but steep hike. No tricky scrambles, but there was a significant danger from falling rock that required hikers to follow proper procedure and avoid having anyone below them.

The Alleged Ghost Peak nevertheless provided an interesting hike for those able to scramble up off the ridge northeast of camp. We got to see the east face of the true Ghost Peak, and the receding glacier below it. Further on to the north, we could see the divide separating Greeley Creek draining north to the Illecillewaet, and Drimmie Creek, draining south and west to the Columbia River.

Kate Pierce: Afternoon activities included mini explorations around camp, revealing that Third Lake had a subterranean outlet with a waterfall appearing from an opening on the other side of the hillside; quiet spots were found to read a good book, sketch and write notes, and many enjoyed a quick, freezing, dip in the First or Ghost Lake to wash off the dust and sweat.

Grizzly Bear sightings towards the end of the week by Cynthia Crampton and Donald Burton in the valley to the southeast added excitement, and their tracks on the snow in the pass were outlined in ash from the smoky air the next morning. Carl Ruemke saw four of them in the valley to the southwest of us that day so they must have passed through our campsite in the night!

Al Payne: It was a challenge to hike the eight kilometres to Mt. MacKenzie and back again between 7 a.m. breakfast and 6 p.m. dinner. Sonia Ward did it by departing with her group of six at 7:30. A later party of two, Gene Brenda and myself, did not leave until 8:30. We were assured we would not make it, but by hustling along, benefiting by the experience of Sonia's party, and making no route-finding mistakes, we managed to get back in time for dinner. When Gene and I reached the summit, we were surprised to see, about 1½ k to the north, a giant Chinook helicopter picking up water from a creek, and dropping it on a small forest fire nearby, no doubt started by the electrical storm earlier in the week.

Marion Boyle: While sitting at lunch at our turn-around point on Leo Eutsler's shorter hike towards Mt. Mackenzie (the "Mackenzie Lite" trip), a very young mountain goat came running down the partly treed hill before us, bleating expectantly. He stopped suddenly when he discovered we were not his family. One of us moved slowly towards him. The kid ran down the rocks in front of us and stopped to look our way, then resumed his plaintive bleating, clearly disappointed in us as he ran back again out of view. An hour earlier, a herd of goats and kids had crossed our path travelling in the opposite direction from us. It might have been his herd, and they must have been far away by now. We could only hope that the young one found his mom and did not join the ranks of the 50% who do not reach adulthood.

Ming Louie (a first-time camper): I loved the whole experience! But I couldn't get over the very early morning breakfasts. I had hoped for the second seating, but Lance, our cook, promptly set me straight: "This isn't a cruise!" I guess you can take a girl out of the city, but you can't take the city out of the girl.

One of many highlights for me was a strategic viewpoint up Ghost Peak, led by Sonia, from where I saw 6 lakes at once. Spectacular! A special moment was shared by all of us on Leo's hike, seeing a lost baby mountain goat on the lesser Mackenzie hike that ended on the ridge just beyond Sonia Lake. Other memories: Leo's happy hour, Siege Rielinger's shower, Bob Holden's dipper, Larry Leonard's kite, and much, much more!

Al Payne: The most challenging summit was Mt. Cartier. It was relatively close to camp, but the easier approach proved to be via a long detour to ascend the south ridge. There were two solo successes: from the south ridge, by Larry Leonard, and from the east ridge by the intrepid photographer, Adam Gibbs. Later, Larry would take two others to the top. My slower party of six did not quite make it because of time constraints (not wanting to miss dinner), thereby avoiding the scramble at the top.

Kate Pierce: As always the meals were great, Lance and Gerry Kretschner working their magic in the cook tent. In a group of over 50 participants there is a wonderful mix of people, both in age and interests, and all week one gets to know new people and catch up with old friends. Evening meetings with mini talks on Bald Eagle nests from Marian Coope, a trip to Pond Inlet with David Foreman, hiking in Spain by Yvonne Gibson, and the history of Revelstoke from Al, entertained us as well as daily trip reports (Leo never managing to return with the same number of people as he started with until the last day) and light-hearted banter about the accuracy of GPS's, compasses, and which direction was which.

Thankfully Al discovered that Ghost Peak was located in the wrong place on the map and solved the problem of incorrect coordinates.

I especially appreciated John Coope who spent an hour patiently showing me how to use keys to identify plants; Frank Ward for showing Phyllis Smith and me how to use an ice axe and stop ourselves sliding down a snowy slope; Leo for being a good neighbour/bar tender/leader; Larry for his kite and positive outlook; Louise Irwin with her encyclopedic knowledge of past camps and camp procedures; and all of the camp committee who put on a very successful and safe camp.

By the end of the week the air was becoming smokier from the forest fires north and south of us, and it was time to clean up, take down the camp and return home. The initial and disorienting shock of noise, cars, people, shops, heat, dust and smoke in Revelstoke made one realize how fortunate we were to be able to spend time in such pristine surroundings and how important such areas are to us all.

Al Payne: Once again, we have drawn criticism from some of the locals about taking a large group into a sensitive alpine area. There is no doubt that the meadows in the vicinity of our dining and cook tents were well trampled down, but we believe that by next year, the damage will be repaired. Nevertheless, we need to seriously consider the merits and feasibility of smaller groups, perhaps even self catered. This could mean, for example, that we would be allowed back into some of the parks that have limits on the size of groups.

After five years as Trip Coordinator, I am planning to step down. If we continue to have the large camps in the present format, a Trip Coordinator will still be necessary, and indeed we will need to maintain the camp committee because of the large amount of organizing and planning involved. If we have small camps, there will be less need for all the positions on the camp committee. The minimum would be any one person who would undertake to do everything, planning, organizing and execution; or delegate as required. For example, the trip planned by Bob Holden and Wally Keil to Vancouver Island last year was really just another camp in a different format. There is also no reason why we could not have more than one camp per year.

Marian Coope for all the campers: Our heartfelt thanks to the whole Camp Committee for the admirable organization of the camp: Gordon Squire, Al and Lorne Payne, Anne Leathem, Gary Thompson, Beth Wark and Michael Wheatley. Your work was enormously appreciated by all.