

## Nature Vancouver Summer Camp at McGillivray Pass, B.C. 25 July to 1 August 2004

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compiled by Marian Coope*

McGillivray Pass is situated between Anderson Lake and Bralorne, near Goldbridge, at the edge of the South Chilcotin. At an altitude of 5950 ft (1830 m), it lies in a valley running NW to SE, with ridges approximately 1000 ft (300 m) higher on either side, and Mt McGillivray (approx. 8500 ft or 2600 m) dominating to the north and beckoning the mountaineers. Historically, the Pass was first used by local Indians, later as a pack trail during the gold rush and then as a supply trail for mining activities in the area. In 1935, a telephone line was installed through the valley floor, and the old wires are still on the ground, running through camp to trip the unwary. Later, they were positioned on top of Standard (or Telephone) Ridge to avoid the heavy snow and steep, avalanching slopes of the valley; the poles for them are still to be seen.

Our four-hour hike in from the north was a gentle climb up Standard Creek, with lunch on the tailings of the old Standard Mine, while the helicopter transporting our gear flew steadily back and forth overhead. Soon after lunch we reached the Pass and started the descent along McGillivray creek to our campsite.

Our camp was situated in a typically U-shaped glaciated valley, on a flat bench above McGillivray Creek. Tents were pitched among the groves of subalpine fir, whose narrow forms rising skyward told of heavy winter snow pack, or in the grassy open meadows surrounded by lupins and valerian. The small stream coming off the hillside to the west provided running water, and the cook and dining tents were raised in a central area. Ming said she set up tent in an attractive cul-de-sac which proved too shady in the early morning and too hot and sunny in the afternoon. She learned that even at camp, location, location, location cannot be overestimated.

The weather was spectacularly good throughout the week, and a daily treat was watching the sunlight creep down the west slope in the morning before the sun itself burst forth over the east ridge into the valley. When the sun arrived, the water line, frozen the first morning, ran freely and we shed toques, long johns and heavy jackets for the day's hikes. Throughout the day hiking was comfortably done in shorts, and by late afternoon the sun had heated our solar showers almost to boiling point. Each evening, the light show was repeated in reverse and hot drinks, extra clothes and hot water bottles followed the sun's departure. One night we were treated to a lovely display of Northern lights with sheets of light rising actively off the eastern ridge. In Don's opinion, needing to pee in the night does have its upside.

**Kate:** On the first day, short exploratory hikes to Standard Ridge and on the opposite side of the valley, the east ridge which we called Ptarmigan Ridge, with the three tarns, gave ideas for other possibilities and allowed us to acclimatize to the altitude. During the week, scrambling ascents of Star Mountain led by Anne Leathem, and Mt. McGillivray led by Jeremy McCall and Anne, proved challenging. Forays at a slower pace with Bill Kinkaid were well attended as we knew we would have time both to botanize and take photos as well as to stop and enjoy the magnificent views. Leo Eutsler led high speed hikes up ridges like a gazelle (too fast, too fast, we moaned). The rock slide up to the tarns was named "the stairclimber" and was one of his favourite routes.

**Ming:** After some encouragement from Leo, I decided to try going up the rock slide to the ridge to get to Star Lake. It was absolutely fabulous. The rock slide wasn't as bad as I thought, but I wouldn't want to do it again. On the hike over the ridge and on the way to Star Lake, as we came down a slope between two snow banks, we stepped onto what appeared to be solid ground and it turned out to be a mudslide, a first for me. It was scary, as I imagined the mud could just swallow us up. We hiked up and around the top of this living mudslide. On the way back, we saw lots of marmots, and horse and grizzly bear tracks. On another trip, we went to the beautiful lower and upper lakes, and many of us enjoyed an afternoon swim with the family

of ducks who had no choice but to share the lake with us, although they stayed as far away as they could. Someone spotted 11 baby ducklings!

**Don:** Flower lovers were well represented so I decided to lead a walk to look at the more neglected mosses, rushes and lichens. With no expertise but Pojar and Mackinnon's *Plants of Coastal British Columbia* and a magnifying glass in hand, we examined riverside, pondside, meadow and woodland. Stephen Partington shared much knowledge that he always professes not to possess. By lunchtime, we reached the twin lineman's cabin rumoured to have been twinned because the linemen looking after the phone line and isolated out here could not get along. Many species were seen and a few were identified, such as narrow-leaved cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Mertens's rush (*Juncus mertensianus*), step moss (*Hylocomium splendens*), *Cladonia*, wolf lichen (*Letharia vulpina*) and speckled horsehair (*Bryoria fuscescens*). We saw how the different species were adapted to the different habitats.

**Kate:** Existing trails were hard to locate but by the end of the week the easiest ways up the slopes had been found. The willows on the east side of McGillivray Creek proved daunting, but David and Elsie Foreman found the very best spot to descend from the ridge where there were none. Non-botanical strolls along the valley bottom with Don Griffiths, and bushwhacking climbs to the lakes SW of camp with John Galpin were popular. Jeremy went down the trail towards Anderson Lake for about six kilometres, but turned back when the low vegetation – salmonberry, false hellebore and stinging nettles, grown exceptionally tall this summer after last year's fires had burned the trees - became too dense and prickly for his shorts-clad legs. Several parties ascended the peaks at the south end of Standard Ridge, and climbed to the upper lake from both above and below. Gary Thompson led his popular annual photography session, which was much appreciated.

**Don:** Special thanks to Jeremy, Leo, Anne and Bill, the energetic heroes who led the way up to the ridges and beyond. Even Roy Edgell, over eighty years old and after heart surgery, made his way successfully up to the east ridge. Thus inspired, I decided to follow Bill up to the tarns on the east ridge via the "Pot of Gold" first explored by Stephen and his son Felix. This turned out to be a spectacularly thick patch of yellow monkey flower (*Mimulus tilingii*) delightfully fringed with purple monkey flowers (*Mimulus lewisii*). Beyond this, the slope steepened, the flora became more alpine, and there was a whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*). My favourites among the new-to-me alpine plants were the moss campion (*Silene acaulis*) and silky phacelia (*Phacelia sericea*). The first tarn was a wonderful destination and allowed for a leisurely lunch. I swam across to where I could climb out onto the snow. That stuff is cold on the bare toes! But even up here at 7000 feet the water was refreshingly swimmable. We hiked further up to some old snow through a delightful meadow with red and yellow paintbrush and blue-purple lupins above the lovely glacial blue of the upper tarn that was edged with yellow-green algae and brilliant white snow. With the varied greens of the valley, our tiny tents down below and the mountains across the valley running into the distance it was definitely worth puffing up the hill.

**Kate:** Evening entertainment starred Nan Gregory, who told us a spell-binding cowboy story, a banjo performance by Mike Castle (interrupted by the sighting of a wolf), a violin performance by eight-year-old Felix, and songs by the VNHS choir. One evening, Ron Andrews, owner of Whitestar Enterprises, gave us a brief overview of his winter ski operations at the cabin at McGillivray Pass, and a history of this private property. He assured us that the vegetation would have recovered from our trampling by September and we hope we have provided a service in re-opening some of the older trails.

On Saturday, as a grand finale, most people took advantage of David's invitation to join him for a swim and eat our picnic lunches at the upper lake before the hot and dusty job of dismantling camp.

My memories will include the "Pot of Gold;" the 360° views from the ridges (only slightly dimmed by smoke from the Lonesome Lake and Whitecap Mtn forest fires); the dense

and colourful gardens of wildflowers growing around the springs and streams; and the generosity of those who shared their knowledge and skills, volunteered their time and worked together to make our small community such a success: David Foreman, camp leader, Gary and all the Camp Committee. Last but not least, and perhaps most important, the food was delicious - a big thank you to Lance Weissner and Gerry Kretschner.

**Don:** The last Saturday at the upper lake was a blissful day of old and new friends leisurely sharing the beauty of our natural world in an idyllic setting. Congratulations especially to Tim Hollick-Kenyon who made the successful effort to climb up on his reworked knees. Many swam and I'm sure everyone was sorry to head back down to start taking apart the camp. It was nice to see everyone pitch in. Many hands truly do make light work.

Thanks to the many whose efforts made for such a memorable camp. One of the main delights of camp for this newcomer was the generosity of the group and everyone was very welcoming and patient in sharing their knowledge and friendliness of the participants. There was a lot of experience and knowledge represented in leading trips, helping identify plants, sharing stories and cheerfully pitching in with even the less pleasant camp tasks - biffy duty anyone?

Once in a blue moon, a camp is perfect. On Saturday night, we stayed up late to howl at the rise of the blue moon: it had been a perfect camp. On Sunday, on the way out, we were treated to two Golden Eagles soaring over the ridge.