
Wild Times

Vancouver's Wild Edge

by Joe Foy, Wilderness Committee

My grandmother was born in Vancouver in 1903. Since that time there has been an ever-growing circle of extended family in the region. Through story telling about the life and times of grand parents, parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, kids, and grandkids, I have come to understand some of the things that make Metro Vancouver such a special urban area.

Wild nature is at the heart of Vancouver's personality. From Stanley Park to the waters of the Salish Sea to the North Shore peaks, to the fabulous Sea to Sky country to the mountains and rivers of the Fraser Valley, nature forms the backdrop to our daily lives.

In early August a friend and I set off on a backpacking trip to Garibaldi Provincial Park – which is a very Vancouver kind of thing to do.

The Garibaldi area is a massive tangle of Coast Mountains – including big tree forests, slide-alder jungle, peaks and glaciers – which was designated provincial park way back in 1927. Located only 70 kilometres from Vancouver's city centre, the park protects a whopping 1,950 square kilometres of some of the most rugged and awe-inspiring landscapes to be found anywhere on Earth.

Park managers have provided a network of trails and managed campsites on the west of the park, accessed from the Sea to Sky highway and centred around popular destinations such as Garibaldi Lake and Cheakamus Lake. But the majority of the park remains unmanaged, with no trails, signs, campsites, bridges or any other infrastructure what-so-ever.

Because Garibaldi is so huge, so rugged, and its vegetation so dense, much of the

park is a seldom visited off-trail adventure paradise.

We started our backpack on the quiet east side of Garibaldi, at the end of the Fire Lake road which snakes up Fire Creek from the Lillooet River Valley near the north end of Harrison Lake.

From the time we left the road and entered the forest, until we returned a week later we didn't see another human being. We were half a day travel from the city and we had this spectacular wilderness to ourselves – that's the nature of living in Metro Vancouver.

Just because we didn't see anyone, doesn't mean we travelled alone. The mountains and valleys here are full of spirits if you know how to look. The entire country we travelled through is the unceded territory of St-at-imc communities of the Lillooet Valley. Looking down from the ridge we were backpacking up, we could see a wetland at the end of Glacier Lake that had been used for generations as a source of food plants for the nearby villages. Snowcap Creek, which drains into Glacier Lake, gives access to ancient travel and hunting routes.

We had started our travels in a thick tangle of mossy fallen logs, devil's club, sword ferns and ancient yellow cedars, but by the end of the day were in a wide open meadow of heather bisected by a little sparkling stream. As the days progressed we passed countless lakes and ponds fed by the melting summer snowfields.

One thing that saddened us was the lack of grizzly bear sign – no footprints or ground that had been dug up hunting for roots or marmots could be seen. At one time this



would have been prime grizzly bear habitat, but a century and a half of guns and habitat destruction in the valley bottoms have almost wiped out the grizzlies of Garibaldi Park.

There is cause for hope though. In 2013, "Power," a female grizzly bear had taken up residence in the upper Pitt River Valley, which flows from the wild heart of Garibaldi provincial Park. If Power persists, her offspring could spark a growing grizzly extended family within Garibaldi Provincial Park.

Roosevelt elk, once common in the valleys of Garibaldi, had been hunted to extinction. But a recently reintroduced herd is doing well in the upper Pitt Valley and has even attracted wolves into the area.

With some luck and careful land-use planning around Garibaldi Provincial Park, we could see the elk, wolves, and grizzlies return to health just in time for my grandkids to live their own adventures on the wild edge of Vancouver.



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