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[Home](#)
[Future trips](#)
[Past trips](#)
[Trip guidelines](#)
[Conditions](#)
[Routes >](#)
[Forum](#)
[Membership](#)
[Reference >](#)
[FAQ](#)
[Photo contest](#)
[What's new](#)
Member
[Login](#)
Changes

- today
- yesterday
- < 7 days
- < 30 days

Comox Glacier Via Frog Ponds (mountaineering)

[return to Reports list](#)

Sat Aug 24 to Sun Aug 25, 2013

 Leader: **Bob St.John**

 Co-Leader: **Carol Hunter**

Weather can be a determining factor on some trips, and I believe the Comox Glacier trip is one of those. While cloud or fog can obscure views, wet rock can make scrambling up and down a more serious matter. So it was in the days before this trip that we watched the weather forecasts with some concern. Luckily a good day shaped up for Sunday, and we took advantage of that by driving in on Saturday for the climb on Sunday.

We met up at 5pm on Saturday and took 3 vehicles up to the trailhead, about a 1.5 hour trip. We noted while getting past the locked gate that motorbikes (and atv's) can and do ignore Timber West's private road policy. While I am not a fan of TW policies and wish they would return to the days of roads open to the public; I was somewhat peeved that we have to jump through numerous hoops with considerable expense to get TW permission, while others get in regardless.

One of our trucks got a flat tire, which we changed without a problem. TW roads into the Cruikshank Valley are hard on vehicles... something the \$15 driver compensation doesn't come close in covering. Kudos to the members who offer to drive into these trailheads! We also noted a lot of new logging roads being built in the Comox Creek Valley... more clearcuts are in the offing, probably right up to the Park boundary.

We camped on the old road by the trailhead and noted the clouds dissipating into a clear moonlit night. The glimpse of glacier seen above looked inviting.

A wake-up at 5:15 for a quick breakfast and packing tents into the trucks got us on the trail by 6:15. It was cool, perfect for the daunting 700m climb up to the ridge, and light enough to pack-away our headlamps. The lower half of the trail is well switchbacked, and with many thanks to the work party of Ken R, Ian H, and Frank H, mainly clear of deadfall. The upper section has some grotty, steep sections, two of which are somewhat protected with rope, although complete trust in them should be avoided. We topped out onto the ridge in about 2 hours, and had a good break in the first meadow, scarred by one of many fire-pits. Inconsiderate hikers are now chopping down alpine trees to satisfy their fleeting need to get smoky clothing. We scattered the remaining charred logs, and picked up the cans and the glass that always ends up in these pits as best we could. One of Park's simpleton No Fires signs was nearby, obviously not getting the message across.

The walk along the ridge was impressive as ever. Sunny skies allowed for the always entertaining game of 'name that peak'. A few puffy clouds appeared on the high peaks while the valleys to the west were shrouded in fog. At the top of the gully leading to the Frog Ponds we all donned our brain buckets. These we wore in the main until we returned here later in the day. They certainly won't save your life in a big fall, but more than likely will save a lot of inconvenience and grief in the more common slips and stumbles.

The two rock-bands on the ridge now sport a rope, but again I wouldn't trust them completely... use them more as an aid to balance. The rest of the trail to Lone Tree Pass went smoothly. The snow chute we encountered last year was gone.

The small stream at Lone Tree was thankfully still running, and we reloaded our bottles for the climb up to the glacier. We noted the puffy clouds of this morning were now joining together as if to do battle with us. We set off quickly to stay a step ahead of whatever Nature was planning.

The 300m climb to the glacier is always a pleasure. The views are outstanding, and the route relatively easy. For the most part it is a steep walk, but if one is in the mood for a bit of scrambling the rock is solid with plentiful holds. When we topped out at the south peak at the glacier's edge the weather was probably at it's worst.. but that was still good enough to continue with only a threat of showers. The very top of Red Pillar was in the cloud, but otherwise we had 360 views.

We roped up and headed across the snowfield/glacier to the north summit. This crossing is often considered benign enough to cross without a rope... and many do. I was happy to have it, especially if the cloud cover came down and visibility dropped. Besides the obvious safety considerations, a rope keeps the group together no matter what the conditions.

We summited at 1:30, a little over 7 hours from the start. The clouds did break up, and we spent a glorious hour relaxing or peering over cliff tops. (While you may think I am bordering on the obsessive, we noted a considerable quantity of egg shells some moron left on the summit. I picked up a few beer cans on the way up as well.)

With some reluctance we left at 2:30 for the long descent. While a pleasant enough trip back, I think we were all getting a little tired, especially on the final climb down off the ridge... it seemed endless. We were all at the vehicles by 7:45, for a total trip of 13.5 hours. Tim surprised us with refreshments for all... much appreciated. The only event of note on the return drive was encountering a good sized herd of elk on the road a few kilometres from the trailhead... probably the same elk seen by the work party the week before.

The success of any trip depends on the participants, and I am pleased to say this group was exceptional. Everyone volunteered to carry the extra group gear, and everyone showed good spirits even on the tiring part near the end. Special kudos to new members Jaime and Lubosh who met all the expectations any leader could hope for in a new participant.

Of special interest to me was a find I would never have thought would occur. On the return across the glacier, I purposely led the group near to where I thought I lost my camera on last year's trip. I had absolutely no hope of finding it, but while scanning the rocks near the snow's edge, I almost stepped on that very camera laying on the snow like I had just dropped it then and there! After several photos, we examined it... it had obvious water in the viewfinder screen, but otherwise looked fine. I will dry it out over the next few days and see 1) if it works, and 2) if the photos are recoverable. More later!

Some interesting stats for the Glacier hike from Tim P.

I was looking at the total accumulated elevation gain on the Comox Glacier hike.

Starting out from the creek crossing at 1770 feet elevation we hiked approximately 10 kilometres to the summit at 6453 feet. The actual elevation gain is 4683 feet. There are three areas where we have to lose elevation. The first one is just beyond the usual 3 day trip camp site. At that point the trail drops 232 feet, either in the gully or on the more exposed rock face.

The next elevation loss is at the end of the ridge beyond Frog Ponds. At that point the drop off is 359 feet. The final elevation loss is at the drop into Lone Tree Pass. Here the loss is only 161 feet. Adding these 3 areas together equals 752 feet x 2, because we have to regain that elevation on the way back, adds up to 1504 feet of additional accumulated elevation. Added to the actual height gain we finish up with 6187 feet or 1903.69 metres. So, if you thought that the trip was a good stroll in the park, you now have the stats to prove it.

More pictures can be viewed [here](#)

[And more pictures here](#) from my Fotki site.



[Lubosh Kloucek photo]



[Lubosh Kloucek photo]



*One of the exposed rock face
climbs*

[Tim Penney photo]



*The other exposed climb with a
hand line for a measure of
security*

[Tim Penney photo]



Checking out our destination
[Carol Hunter photo]



[Lubosh Kloucek photo]



[Lubosh Kloucek photo]



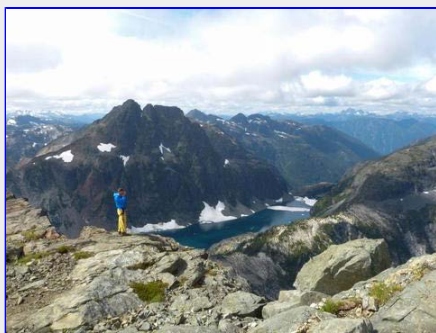
Clambering up the last ridge
[Glenn Ord photo]



*Snow cave feature on the way
up*
[Glenn Ord photo]



*A lot less snow at the south side
of the Comox Glacier compared
to last year*
[Tim Penney photo]



Milla Lake
[Carol Hunter photo]



The Crossing
[Carol Hunter photo]



*Getting off rope at the north side
of the glacier*
[Tim Penney photo]



*Summit (Lubosh, Tim, Carol,
Glenn, Jaime, Linda, Bob-front)*
[Bob St.John photo]



Looking back down the ridge on the way home
[Linda Hamilton photo]

Report contributors: Carol H, Lubosh K, Glenn O, Tim P, Bob S,

Participant list (7 of 7): Jaime C, Linda H, Carol H, Lubosh K, Glenn O, Tim P, Bob S,

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