



BCMC

BC Mountaineering Club
Newsletter

Oct 2018, Vol 95, No. 2

UPCOMING BC MC SOCIAL	
At the ANZA Club 7:30 pm Tuesday, Oct 9 - Dean Chamberland presents the BC MC Summer Camp Adventures held this year at Overseer Basin.	

British Columbia Mountaineering Club

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Esther and Martin Kafer

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exec@

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CLUB EQUIPMENT FOR HIRE

The club maintains two personal locator beacons and four ice tools, which are available for rental by members only.

The rental rate is \$10 per day for each item.

Fees are non-refundable and payable in advance and a refundable deposit may be required, at the equipment manager's discretion. Instructional Programs are exempt from rental fees, all other uses are subject to the rental fees.

The equipment is stored at our storage unit near Lougheed and Rupert in Vancouver.

Contact rentals@bcmc.ca to book equipment.

The **BC MOUNTAINEERING CLUB NEWSLETTER** is an official publication of the B.C. Mountaineering Club and is published 10 times per year (every month except July and August). All material within this newsletter is copyright © British Columbia Mountaineering Club.

Cover Photo: Scrambling up the Fisher Chimneys on Mt Shuksan (Photo: Mohammad Pahrbod)

Submit Your Content:
editor@bcmc.ca

Submissions: We want you to write for us! Any submitted news, events, trip reports, letters relevant to the BCMC will be published unless the club executive decides otherwise.

About Submissions: For photos, high resolution is much appreciated. Submitted material may be edited for clarity or brevity, or for consistency with club policies. Opinions and comments expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the BCMC.

Scheduled trips: How they work

Participation on club trips is open to any person with adequate skills and experience, subject to the approval of the trip organizer. All non-member participants must sign a disclosure and waiver form relieving the club and all other participants on the trip from any liability. A trip organizer is not a certified guide. The function of the organizer is to organize the trip, ensure that it gets underway, know the access to the area, and know a route or routes on the climb. It is expected that each person on a club trip has the necessary skills, experience, fitness, and equipment. The organizer may specify certain equipment mandatory for participation in a trip. Any person who attempts to participate in a club trip without such mandatory equipment may be requested to withdraw. Each person on a club trip is responsible for his or her own safety and for checking the equipment used. Please be considerate and call the trip organizer more than 1 day prior to the trip.

If you are given a ride, please remember to pay the driver your portion of the car costs. If you decide not to go on a trip for which you have previously registered, please be courteous and inform the trip organizer.

The BCMC welcomes the following new members who joined August 23, 2018 to September 30, 2018:

Alex Smolinski	Dylan de Paul	Marek Nowicki	Richard Wagers
Andrea Gray	Faye Wilson	Marie-Hélène Themens	Ryan Lemay
Andrew Davies	James Garrow	Mark Shepherd	Ryan Simpson
Anna Bron	Jesse Listoen	Martin Jonker	Sandra Berube
Arnold Bernardo	Joachim Boge	Meagan Leicht	Sandy Briggs
Bozena Topola	Joe Barnwell	Mel Mundell	Sebastian Alcaino
Daniel Massot	Joshua Zahl	Michele Parisien	Susan Blank
Danny Kovach	Ken Simpson	Nancy Preston	Thomas Derksen
David Grant	Lukas Slotman	Nichola Bendle	

UPCOMING TRIPS ~ Sign up, updates and details at bcmc.ca

Oct 4	Climbing @ Climb Base 5 - A5	Daniel Jay
Oct 5-8	Athelney Pass, north of Pemberton - C3	Christopher Barton
Oct 5-8	Vantage Rock Climbing - A5	Esteban Guisado
Oct 6-7	Snass Mtn - B2	Alice Obermajer
Oct 13-14	Mt John Clarke - C2	Alastair Ferries
Oct 20	LOST: Learn Outdoor Survival Tactics - \$128	Be Wild Adventures
Oct 26-28	LOST: Learn Outdoor Survival Tactics - \$425	Be Wild Adventures
Oct 27-28	Mt Frosty - B2	Alice Obermajer

Check <https://bcmc.ca/m/events> for late additions

CYPRESS MOUNTAIN'S GROUP SEASON PASS

PRICING DEADLINE is October 4, 2018 -

Radmila Bridges

You can buy ANY of the Alpine OR Nordic season passes.

Prices for all passes can be found here:

<http://www.cypressmountain.com/groupseasonpass/>

To buy your pass online, please follow the instructions as stated below:

1. Please use the following link: <https://www.tixforcypressmountain.com/e-commerce/GrpLogin.aspx>
2. To access these special rates you will need to login in to the online sales system with the following:
Username: bridges
Password: 19SKYCHAIR
3. You are now logged into our online sales system and will be able to purchase your passes at your discounted group rates. Please also note credit cards are the only form of payment for online purchases.

MEC Fall "10%Discount" Club Night -

Bala Kumaravelu

This event will take place at the MEC Vancouver store, 130 West Broadway, on **Thursday, November 1st 2018 from 7:00-9:00pm.**

Registered BCMC Members will receive **10% off on *all* (with a few exceptions) regularly priced in-stock items purchased that evening – including bikes and boats!** Basically, all eligible items must be in stock at the store and purchased through the tills that evening. This means the Club Night discount will not apply to items ordered or purchased online through the MEC website. ***NOTE: the discount does not extend to clearance items, any Blundstone products, or items part of a packaged discount.** Finally, be aware that items that have been purchased before the event cannot be returned and re-purchased at the discounted rate.

Email questions to radmila.bridges@gmail.com.



VIMFF FALL SERIES

It's that time of year - the 2018 Fall Series will be kicking off on October 15 with 6 amazing shows over 5 nights at the Centennial Theatre and Rio Theatre! Catch some of most highly anticipated mountain films - including Free Solo, The Dawn Wall, This Mountain Life and The Condor & The Eagle. Be inspired by our guest speaker line-up - legendary mountaineer Doug Scott, freeride mountain biker Darren Berrecloth, and more. Share this sneak peek with your friends and get ready for an adventure filled Fall Series. Tickets go on sale THIS Mon, Sept 24!

And more great news - we are doing a two-part Fall Series this year which means even more environmental, ski, climbing and mountain adventure shows. The second part of the Fall Series will be held from November 13-18 - the November program will be released in October. <https://vimff.org/program/>

FINAL MONTH OF ORGANIZER CHALLENGE 2018

- Bill Maurer

The Organizer Challenge is nearing the end of its second year. Anyone organizing 6 trips with a minimum of 4 participants in the period between Nov 1, 2017 and Oct 31, 2018 is eligible to win a \$50 MEC gift certificate. So far 9 of our organizers have met this requirement. Recently the stats of the challenge have been automated and the real time results are available at https://bcmc.ca/organizer_challenge.php.

Standings		
Rank	Organizer	Trips
#1	Paul Kubik	16
#2	Cliff Eschner	13
#3	Radmila Bridges	12
#4	Oudina Cherfi	8
#5	Chris Ludwig	7
#6	Joe Blakeman	7
#7	Paul Schrimpf	6
#8	Winifred Swatschek	6
#9	Ibrahim Alshathri	6
	Wayne Pattern	5
	Dean Chamberland	4
	Esteban Guisado	4
	Jim Nosella	4
	Jonathan Colyer	4

Our latest winners are Radmilla Bridges, Chris Ludwig, Winifred Swatschek, and Ibrahim Alshathri. The trip attendance sheet must be filled out to qualify. The following event categories are eligible for this prize: Backcountry Skiing, Backpacking Trip, Canyoneering, Expedition, Family Hiking, Hiking, Hut Construction, Ice Climbing, Instructional Program, Mixed Climbing, Mountain Running, Mountaineering, Practice, Rock Climbing, Scrambling, Snowshoeing, Trail Clearing, and Training.

The relative growth of recreational hiking in southwestern B.C. has far outpaced the region's population growth. Fifty years ago, the number of people on any weekend in the mountains of southwest B.C. might have been a dozen or so, and there were few guidebooks. Many people looked upon hiking and mountaineering as oddball activities: as a rather brutal high school teacher of mine put it, "real men don't hike or climb mountains." The first proper trail guide, as distinct from just a listing, was probably 20 Lower Mainland Hiking Trails, compiled and printed as a reader service by The Daily Province and published in 1963. Its successor, Hiking Trails, compiled and printed as a reader service by the Province, was compiled by Fred Curtin and went through several editions between about 1971 and 1977. The newspaper also sponsored occasional hikes for the public to some of the easier of these routes.

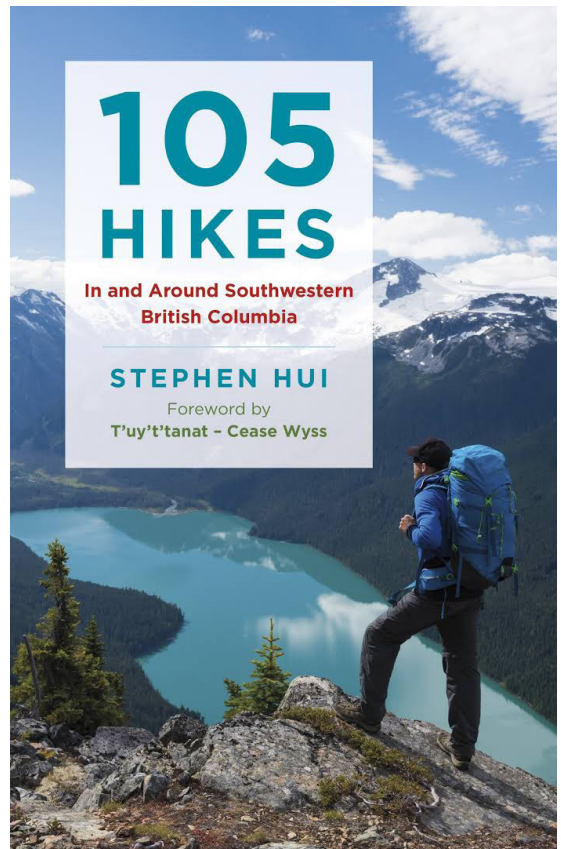
Many of these trails were described, marked, and maintained by the Mountain Access Committee (later the Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia), an informal organization consisting of delegates from six lower mainland outdoors organizations, including the Alpine Club of Canada, the North Shore Hikers and, most importantly, the B.C. Mountaineering Club (BCMC). From about 1966 to 1972, the Federation of Mountain Clubs published a Mountain Trail Guide for the South West Mainland area of British Columbia.

In 1966, the Mountaineers (Seattle) published the first edition of 100 Hikes in Western Washington. Inspired by this, the following year a BCMC committee began to compile a similar guide to southwestern B.C., under the general guidance of John Harris, a past president of the club. The book, 103 Hikes in Southwestern British Columbia, appeared in 1973. It was largely prepared by David and Mary Macaree following the model of 100 Hikes and published jointly by The Mountaineers and the BCMC, with the Seattle organization fronting the money.

The book was an immediate success and was reprinted several times before a revised second edition appeared in 1980. This new edition was published by Douglas and McIntyre (Canada) and The Mountaineers (United States), with the authors listed as "Mary and David Macaree on behalf of the British Columbia Mountaineering Club."

By the time the fourth edition appeared in 1994, hiking and mountaineering had become popular, something that "real" men and women could do without feeling like eccentrics. Today there are many hundreds or even thousands of people out hiking in southwest B.C. every weekend. David Macaree died in 1998, Mary in 2008, and the fifth (2001) and sixth (2008) editions were largely prepared by Jack Bryceland, a long-time BCMC member. Competing guidebooks appeared, but 103 Hikes remained the bible. Over its 45-year life, the book sold over 100,000 copies, according to the publisher.

The current book, 105 Hikes in and Around Southwestern British Columbia, is advertised by the publisher as the successor to 103 Hikes. It is the first without any direct connection to the BCMC, although a portion of the revenue from sales will go to the BCMC. The author was a writer and photographer with the Georgia Straight for eight years and is currently the communication lead for B.C. at the Pembina Institute. He is younger than the Macarees when they started



their project and Jack Bryceland when he took it on, and this helps give the book a “younger” feel. The title change, from “103” to “105” also breaks with the 103 Hikes tradition.

The book is closely modelled on 103 Hikes, though. The hikes are each longer than three hours and shorter than twelve. Each hike is allotted two pages, beginning with summary material on distance, time, elevation gain, difficulty, and a subjective quality rating. The necessary but often-boring details on road access are placed at the end of the main hike description. It is good to see public transit options described; many outdoors-oriented people don't have cars. Maps, one for each hike, were always a weak point in the old books, although they had improved by Bryceland's tenure. The new maps are much better: real maps, in colour, with contours, and icons showing points of interest, trail junctions, peaks, and so forth.

Each hike is accompanied by one photo, all but one taken by the author. These are a mixed bag as far as usefulness and quality go. Some are excellent; a few others, such as the one of Illal Mountain, are so poorly reproduced as to be useless. Some, such as the photo of the purple starfish, seem to me to add little to the book. The photo of Needle Peak has its summit annoyingly cut off, perhaps because of the designer's need to keep within the two-page format for each hike.

In a book such as this, the choice of hikes to include is always a personal one. The area covered has been expanded to include southern Vancouver Island, hills near Bellingham, and the Gulf and San Juan Islands. A necessary consequence is that there are fewer hikes in the Lower Mainland than in the old books. The selection of hikes seems good, although it is weak in the Chilliwack valley area, and the Howe Sound-Whistler area is over-represented. Unlike some hiking books, the author has personally done all the trips included.

The description for each hike covers the trail, trail conditions, points of interest, safety notes, and, in some cases, comments on flora and fauna. An unusual and welcome feature is the inclusion of indigenous place names where appropriate and known. Unwelcome to me is the seemingly arbitrary renaming of The Lions to the Sisters or Twin Sisters. It could be argued that the Twin Sisters is a more appropriate name than the Lions, but The Lions has over a century of well-entrenched usage. People familiar with the 1953 pamphlet, *The Ascent of the Lions*, published by the Vancouver City Archives may find, as I do, The Lions to be a perfectly adequate name with no compelling reason to change it.

The text is rounded out by a foreword and welcome by T'uy't'tanat – Cease Wyss, a Coast Salish ethnobotanist; a tribute to Mary and David Macaree by publisher Rob Sanders; and sections on safety and ethical hiking by Michael Coye and Jaime Adams. An extensive table summarizes the hikes by quality, difficulty, suitability for kids, and other factors.

Any guidebook is only as good as the information it contains. I have done just two of these hikes since the book came out. One of them, Brandywine Mountain, has a major blunder in the driving directions (go left on the Brandywine Creek road, not right as instructed). On the other, Illal Mountain, the driving directions are a bit sketchy and can lead to confusion, something that a few more words could have prevented. Time will tell if there are other such mistakes; if there are, they could be posted on a web site and fixed in the next edition. But on the whole, this book is a fine successor to 103 Hikes, and I hope it goes through as many editions as the Macaree-Bryceland books.

November AGM Director/Volunteer Nomination Form - Chris Ludwig

We are extremely pleased to announce the creation and launch of our first formal nomination form and system for the upcoming November AGM Elections/Board Positions. The form also allows for any member to submit and express their interest to volunteer for this wonderful club in any way of their choosing. This year, the BCMC BOD has decided to expand next year's board from 9 to 17 directors, which is now supported under the new 2017 BCMC constitution (this motion will be made at the November AGM). Our club is growing, and simply put, the current board of 9 is not enough to keep up with the needs of the club and to avoid director and volunteer burnout.

Our new Nomination Form is live for all members here.

<https://backcountrybc.ca/club-private/bcmc-2018-executive-nomination-form>

Director Position submission close date: October 26th, 2018. Note that all submissions are vetted collectively by the current BCMC Board of Directors and are required to have been paid club members for a minimum of one year and to have paid their dues..

Positions: Past President* (non elected), President*, Vice President, Secretary*, Treasurer*, Trips*, Courses*, Camps*, Equipment*, Socials*, Memberships*, Cabins and Trails*, Communications, Fundraising*, Webmaster, Editor*, Recreation and Conservation*, Non-Board Volunteer.

* denote positions for which we currently have a candidate.

Wonderful and enthusiastic candidates have come forward now for all but three of the 17 BCMC Board positions for 2018-2019. Here are brief descriptions for the available positions:

- 1) Vice-President
- 2) Communications
- 3) Webmaster

Descriptions:

1) **Vice President** is the assistant to the president and fills in for those duties in his/her absence. Able to chair board meetings and do announcements at the socials. Also fills in gaps for other board members and assists with strategic planning.

2) **Communications Director** will manage the BCMC social media team, handle and respond to public inquiries to the club with the assistance of the BCMC first-responder team, and dissemination information as directed by the board.

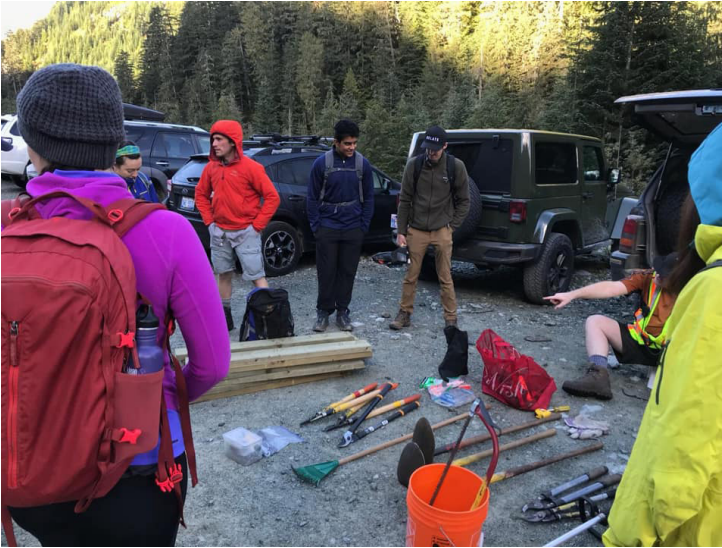
3) **Webmaster** - will manage the existing BCMC website with the support of the experienced BCMC Web Team (3 members). This is a great opportunity to improve your web skills with the support of a veteran web team.

Mountain Lake Hut Upgrade - Paul Kubik

Before and after the facelift. We applied last year to MEC under its Community Grant program and were awarded \$15,000 for the upgrade. A big shout out and thank you from BCMC to Mountain Equipment Co-op.



Watersprite Trail work - September 29, 2018 - Chris Ludwig



Photos from last Saturday's Watersprite Lake Trail Building Trip. All goals accomplished including 4 KM of brushing, new bridge decking, new stairs, new boardwalk and repaired decking.

Gotta have tools for the job — with Gurbaz Singh at Watersprite Lake.



Working to replacing anti-slip shingling on bridges. — with Chris Ludwig at Watersprite Lake.

Bribes, Lies, and Deception on Mont Blanc - Dean Chamberland

The long flight from Vancouver to Switzerland blended June 30th and July 1st into one day. Happy Canada day 2018!

There was no time to celebrate – we were soon on a small, crowded bus driving into France from Geneva. Sometime later, I was dropped off in a very small village called Le Fayet, while Wayne and Momo continued on to Chamonix: the Whistler of Europe and considered the birthplace of modern mountaineering. Le Fayet in St Gervais des Bains was far smaller - think of a French Alps version of Hope, BC – and was close to the tram that goes to the trailhead.

Travelling solo - my expedition partner's health caused a cancellation a few weeks prior - I decided to push ahead with an accelerated climbing schedule before the weather worsened mid-week. And having researched the route and mountain thoroughly, I felt confident I could do it without an expensive guide. Packed for the hike, I went to bed at about 11 pm (2 pm back home) only to wake 4 hours later, and could not get back asleep. The balcony had French doors (of course) and I enjoyed watching the sun slowly rise over the jagged peaks surrounding the township as the birds sang in the warm morning air.

Day 1: Monday July 2nd

After a great hotel breakfast - my gawd the French know how to make bread – it was time to board the nearby Tramway du Mont-Blanc; it ascends from 580m at the village up to 2,070 m (2nd last station) over a distance of 10 km. This took an hour and then it was time to hike the rest of the way. We could have been taken further and saved 30 minutes of hiking if the last section was not under repair.



The trail to Tete Rousse glacier and refuge at 3,170m is well-marked and straight forward, with only a few areas of exposure; the more dangerous parts have fixed cables for safety. Views were absolutely stunning and my spirits were high. There were probably 15 people from the tram hiking up and you could hear a mix of languages. This mountain is no less than a global alpine destination.

It was nice to see the hut and I had booked a bed here to be safe, however wanted to continue upward to the higher Gouter refuge to shorten the final leg to the summit tomorrow. A worker warned me off this, saying they were full above. This was disappointing, especially since my legs were feeling good and there was plenty of time left in the day.

I settled in at the hut, knowing some sleep was a good idea; I had arrived in France less than 24 hours earlier after all. A crate of crocs greets you at the door and once inside, it was like no alpine hut I had ever seen. You could buy a variety of beverages, snacks, meals and even some basic sundries. The bunk was clean and comfortable, however I couldn't sleep deeply for a long time - it was probably the altitude. Later, as I socialized with other hikers outside, our conversations were occasionally interrupted by the ominous sounds of rock fall in the Couloir du Gouter.



Eventually dinner time came and our table ate as a group from the shared plates: pork with vegetables, barley, hearty soups, the local cheese, olives and an amazing dessert assortment – “La mousse au chocolat, s’il vous plait.” It’s amazing what the chefs crafted with such skill at this remote post.

I prepped my gear for the next day – hopefully a summit day, given the forecast – then tried to get some sleep. It did not come easily and when it did, it wasn’t for as long as needed. I was wondering if I should have brought sleeping pills. I did bring Diamox, but my pride would only allow its use if I was really

hurting. Lying in bed, I tried not to think about the nickname for the couloir.

Day 2: July 3rd

They ask you your preference when you register, and so for us few early risers, the first breakfast was served at 1 am (the 2nd is at 4 am if I recall): there were pastries, cheese, sliced meats, milk, cheerios, oatmeal and some fruit along with coffee and tea. I was very sleepy but also very committed, and so wolfed down as much as possible despite a limited appetite. A few others were up and their guides were getting them ready. I left the Tete Rousse hut at 2:11 am, and crossed up the glacier toward the Grand Couloir (Couloir du Gouter or Death Gully), the first section of extreme danger. I knew most deaths occur on this short stretch due to falling rock, and so it’s best to cross it in the morning. The upper part of the route to the next refuge involves some steep scrambling, but it was this stretch that I was most worried about on the entire route.

I watched a guided group a few hundred meters ahead cross the couloir, headlamps bouncing in the frigid darkness. Looking behind and counting the lights, it appeared I was the only solo climber. Nearer to the couloir, the path seemingly ended at a blocky waterfall and I became unsure. Now what? The guided trio behind passed by and went right up it. Alright; I did the same. They then clipped on to the fixed cable and made their way across while I got my gear prepared, tied into my harness and clipped on to the cold steel cable, very mindful of the exposure below. It was cold and dark, I was sleep-deprived, and this was steep and unfamiliar terrain; enthusiasm had faded into apprehension.

I started across, but the snow had melted out in the middle and so you move further from the fixed line. A quarter of the way, I realized I didn’t have enough cordelette length to stay attached, so backtracked and unclipped. My mind used this as an excuse to turn back to the hut, promising to return either when the sun comes up or later next week when my friends plan to hike up. Recalling some of the scarier couloir YouTube videos, my courage had fled.

So I went back to the waterfall, then paused . . . thinking perhaps I should give it another try. I came all this way and have had the mountain in my sights for a while now. I can’t give up this easily, but I now began

doubting that I would summit. I was thinking too much, though I did come up with a solution.

I went through my bag and found a 120 cm sling, attached that to my line and clipped in again. "Just do it!" That was enough and I made it across quickly and without incident. It was 3:18 am and now the task was simply a scramble to the Gouter Hut at 3,817m. I caught up with a Russian group and we took turns looking for the best route up in the darkness. As the sky was getting a little brighter, I eventually found myself at the top of the steep route climbing a rusty ladder onto metal grating. Gouter was a short, snowy trek away from this original hut building.



I entered the sleepy refuge for a short rest just before 6 am, putting on additional layers. The time permitted me to think, and doubt began to poison my spirits. I forced some food and liquids down, and reminded myself that it was easier snow and glacier travel from here.

Though a long slog, following the clear path in the snow was easy. Up ahead was

the same trio from earlier: a British couple and their French guide. I usually move at a quick pace, and expected to catch up to them. After a while, it became apparent that my conceit was unsupported: I was not able to move at my normal speed. A guide helping set pace and motivate would have been nice right about now. Little sleep since boarding the plane and now the altitude were making me earn every step. And being at only 4,100m and with 3 km to go, the peak felt so far away in distance, altitude and time. The mental fatigue in particular was a burden – I was now fully expecting to miss the summit. I accepted this, lowered my goals, and instead aimed for the Dome du Gouter at 4,300m elevation and 700m away.

The wind picked up at the Dome, which I neared at 7:45 am. That sub-goal was achieved, so I then set my sights on the Gouter Refuge emergency shelter a kilometer ahead.

The ridge flattened a bit and the wind worsened. I got to the metal shack and stopped on the leeward side to catch my breath. A pair of mountaineers were resting there too. From here it was a steep hike up narrow ridges called Les Bosses ('bumps'). I felt comfortable with the exposure, however it was my condition that caused me concern. I doubted my strength and reaction time, so tied my axed to my harness in case of a fall - it might help self-arrest. It now seemed certain I would not have the energy to summit, so lowered my final target to La Grand Bosses' sub-summit at 4,513m. That would still be a worthwhile accomplishment and higher than I've ever been. I was completely comfortable with that decision at the time.

As I started up that steep section around 8 am, each step was a battle. In a mild delirium, I began bribing myself to get just a bit further: 100 points if I can get to that spot 3 meters away. 50 points to get to that

footprint 2 meters away. 120 points to go just over there. In perhaps my most desperate moment, came an offer to pay myself \$10,000 to go just another 50 meters and then I can turn around. Didn't matter that it made no sense, and I laughed for thinking it; I was just trying to distract myself. And hopefully keep going just a bit further. It worked. Stay in balance when ascending, rest, then move again. Over and over...for hours.

Drained, exhausted - I teased, bribed and enticed myself for a good kilometer, somehow gaining over 300m in the process, all the while repeating my hiking equation: time + effort = elevation gain.

Having suffered so many false summits over the years, I continually doubted it each time another narrow crest ahead was revealed. Eventually though, I began to run out of mountain. Around 10am, the trio ahead stopped – about 10 minutes away. They appeared to be at or near the top. I was about 35m below and a hundred away from the summit, according to my gps. Finally, and for the first time today, I believed I would summit.



Renewed and confident, I pushed on just a little faster. I brought out my camera and began taking photos again as the sun made a quick appearance. Keep going... almost there. With a weary grin forming, I caught up to the guide and the Brits, one of whom was kneeling from exhaustion; I could relate! A group of 5 were also on summit, preparing to descend. It was an unassuming peak; no cairn, post or flag. Just a smooth and rounded dome with blowing snow and suddenly cloud. I was standing on Mont Blanc at 10:18 am; less than 48 hours after our plane's landing. Perhaps that's why I was not feeling very good, despite the achievement.

Time for only a few, quick pictures - I thought it best to get the hell back down asap. Shortly after summiting, the long descent began. It was more fun going down, and I was now relaxed enough to notice the gorgeous views.

My heart soared with pride and I gazed in awe at how far below everything else was. The camera was heavily used for the next hour, as were my legs; they and everything else began to weaken from fatigue by the time the emergency shelter was passed, and later at the Dome du Gouter. Really dragging my tail at this point, truly exhausted, I had used all my energy getting up and had chosen to leave nothing for the descent. Can't recall running this low on fumes before.



I wanted to get to the lower hut (Tete Rousse) however there were two problems: extreme fatigue with no energy to go that much further safely; and the afternoon rock falls in the grand couloir. Being 4 hours behind schedule - due to starting at Tete Rousse rather than Gouter - I could not cross the couloir in the safety of the cold morning anymore. I would just have to crash at the higher Gouter Refuge. Would they have an available bed? Didn't care much; even the hall would be enough because I'd collapse anywhere at this point.

The hut was buzzing with activity when I arrived. Fortunately they had space and my credit card was gratefully handed over. Feeling dehydrated, another 18€ was eagerly spent on bottles of water, chocolate milk and juice, then I unpacked, changed, and laid down. A mild headache prevented a good sleep at this elevation (3,840m) but the rest was still welcome. After a great dinner, gear was prepped and I tried to get some sleep. The body was feeling better, having been rehydrated, refueled and rested, however I now had a stronger headache. That never happens to me, so I assumed that once back down in the valley I'd be feeling normal again.

In the small hours of the morning, a commotion in the hall awoke some of us: a young woman (possibly Dutch) was suffering and speaking to a guide with some medical training. I didn't catch the entire conversation, however he said that a helicopter would come at dawn if she didn't improve. He gave her Diamox and as she groaned in the hall, you could hear others around also not having the best sleep.

Day 3: Wednesday July 4th

Awake much of the night, I was up at 5 am and was out the door just before 6. The scramble down was far

better and faster in the light, and the grand couloir was also much less intimidating than the morning before. Confidence restored, I was tempted to do it without clipping into the cable, but decided on being safe. You could see the long and deadly drop-off this time around.

Knowing the first tram would depart at 9:30 am, there was motivation to get back down without delay. I made good time and was down in just 3 ½ hours from Gouter Refuge, returning to the trailhead 48 hours after starting. The lower elevation and warm sun felt great, and it was an enjoyable tram ride down with a number of other tourists.

It was hot in the valley and the distance to my hotel was mercifully short. That afternoon and the next day were very hard. I barely slept due to a terrible migraine; it felt like lateral swelling along my brain, and so was likely high-altitude cerebral edema, even though I had now descended. Aware that I was pushing myself too fast after just landing, I had accepted the health trade-off to get the mountain quickly done before the weather deteriorated, and to also allow time for visiting the French Riviera.

With the mountain behind me and since I was really hurting, I decided to take two diamox, then ibuprofen. It takes time to reduce swelling, and I was beginning to understand why you should take the medication before, during and after high altitude trips.

It wasn't until I arrived by train in Milano Thursday night and had the best sleep in a week there, that I began to feel better. It was now time to be a tourist: the next week was full of travelling through Italy and France, with Nice being a highlight.

Looking back, weather and an audacious agenda compelled me to rush the trip more than I should have. Catching up on sleep and spending more time acclimating would have improved my performance. At the time, I reminded myself that mountaineering is suffering, however it certainly could have been lessened. Fortunately, Wayne and Momo made it up too, just over a week later when favourable conditions returned. I'd say they did it right by building their two weeks around the mountain, spending time to adjust to the time zone,

and getting a few hikes in while waiting for MB's conditions to improve before going up with a guide. The objective was achieved by all and I certainly learned and explored much along the way.

A number of fatal accidents occurred in the following days; 16 people have so far died on Mont Blanc during the 2018 season, compared to 14 in 2017. On July 14th, the same day we flew back to Vancouver, officials for the first time declared Mont Blanc off limits to anyone without a reservation at the 'impossible to book without a guide' Gouter hut.

Had we started two weeks later, I would not have been able to summit. Back in February, the trip was timed for early July to avoid the later crowds and benefit from higher, safer snow levels. There was no way to know the access would become restricted. Perhaps it's time to write that cheque, while my luck still holds...

Selected photos: Dean's Mont Blanc Flickr Page (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/132937895@N04/albums/72157698699484695>)

Mont Blanc Timeline:

Day 1:

Tram 8:20 - 9:25

Started hike from Mont Lachat stn at 9:29 am

Station Nid D'Aigle: 9:58

Tete Rousse Refuge: 12:06

Day 2:

Depart Tete Rousse: 2:11 am

Through Grand Couloir at 3:18

Gouter Refuge at 5:55

Dome de Gouter 7:42 am

Summit 10:18 am (stayed 10 mins on summit)

Gouter Refuge return 12:53 pm

Day 3:

Depart Gouter Refuge 5:51 am

Tram station Lachat 9:21 am

Total moving time up: 11:45 hours

Total moving time down: 6 hours