

A person in a blue jacket and yellow helmet is climbing a steep, snow-covered mountain slope. The background features a large lake, forested hills, and distant mountains under a clear sky.

BCMC
BC Mountaineering Club
NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025, VOL 101 NO. 1

Upcoming BCMC Social

February 11th, 2025 at the Anza Club



Presented by: Jack Creighton

In September 2023 a team of regular and reservist soldiers and officers from The British Army's Royal Engineers embarked on "Leg 4 of Ex ATLANTIC QUEST 23", a part of one of the most ambitious adventurous training expeditions undertaken at Corps level for some years. Meeting the Challenge was the 72ft yacht "Adventure of Hornet" in the Falkland Islands. After its epic three month voyage from the UK, the crew sailed across 870 nautical miles of South Atlantic Ocean to the remote British Overseas Territory of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. The next month was spent dodging icebergs and elephant seals, camping out on huge glaciers or in snow holes, hauling each other out of crevasses, and climbing mountains that only a handful of people, if any at all, have attempted.

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 submitted photos, high resolutions are 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.

About the BCMC Newsletter

The BCMC 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: Sarah Ries – Harvey North Ramp

Club Updates

The BCMC newsletter is back and just in time to kick off the first month and a bit of 2025! Our once regular newsletter cadence has been missed and we apologize for the lapse in publishing. Moving forward we're committing to a more regular publishing scheduling to keep you up to date on the club's activities. So without further adieu, here is the latest with the BCMC:

President's Message

By Greg Hamilton

Thanks once again for all of the support as I settle into my new role within the club. It has been a great couple of months. I know that there are dozens of volunteers that work on many different things to keep this club running, vibrant, and relevant to you, the members. For all of those volunteers, I feel an immense sense of gratitude for all of the work that you do on behalf of our community. And I hope that many club members feel as I do.

In recent years, interest in mountaineering related activities has grown immensely. So to has the club. New members now arrive weekly... and often for two reasons. When asked, they often tell me something along the lines of: "I want to connect to an active community that has a lot of trips on the schedule" and "I want to learn skills". And when I speak with longer term members about why they've stayed in the club I've heard a variety of answers, but they boil down to "because of the friendships I've made, and the stories I hear." Every member of this club is seeking a connection of some sort. So, with that idea in mind, I've been thinking about how, during my tenure, to guide the club in a way that enhances our community for all of us, be they new to the club or a grizzled veteran of many drives up (and down!) the Sea to Sky corridor.

So, to that end, if all goes well, you should see some changes in the year ahead. First up: The club is revamping its website with a newly struck committee, many of them who are new-ish to the club volunteer ranks. It'll be a big job. The general idea is to make the new website easier to navigate and be more user friendly to visitors that use their phones to connect online.

I've been around the club for awhile (this is my 30th year, having joined in 1996). Prior to the website going online (and for quite a few years after it launched), the club mailed a monthly newsletter to members. In it was the trip schedule and other relevant trip related information...like the organizers phone number! Can you imagine? Calling someone to sign up for a trip and having to talk with them prior to meeting at St. Davids. How bizarre in today's world.

But the newsletter served another purpose beyond just announcing the trip schedule. There were lots of things that members cared about mentioned in the newsletter: op/ed pieces about access, the environment, and advocacy were some subjects. There were also marriage announcements (it ain't the BCMC for nothing!), club updates, poetry, and some very funny mountaineering tales. There was even the odd advertisement. Trip reports were also abundant. The newsletter was a means for the club to connect to its members, but also for members to connect to the community.

However, contrary to the past where trip reports were shared within our community, trip reports today are now often published online in any of a dozen different spots...and available to tens of thousands of folks rather than to just other club members. I feel that that increase in searchable efficiency has unfortunately, eroded the sense of a close community we at one time shared. Trip reports are more than just an accounting of events. When we share stories amongst our community, we strengthen it – a trip report lets club members know where their friends are going and what adventures (or trouble!) they are getting into. Sadly, in the last few years, we as members haven't been great with supplying the club's newsletter editor with content, including trip reports. I'd like to change that in the year ahead. But the volunteer editor can't conjure content. If many of us contribute we'll see a more regular cadence of the newsletter. Its up to each of you to tell a story, give an opinion, or report back on the advocacy that you're doing. Others in the club want to know what you think, what you are doing and where you are going. So tell us! Sharing those things add value to our community.

A regular feature of today's club trips is that participants, at the end of a trip, almost always share photos amongst each other. But its not often that those images find their way to the club. So we are looking at a new means to make it easier for you to share those photos more widely to our community. Stay tuned while we work out the bugs!

As far as other community building initiatives go, the club is adding a 5th hut to its inventory. It should be available to members next summer. A volunteer crew, led by Dave Scanlon, has done a huge amount of work to get the club's "Hut on Hollyburn" ready to go. I'm looking forward to benefiting from their sweat labour. Strangely enough, it's been years since the club had a hut this close to the city. In some sense, it's a throwback to the club's early days. It's sure to become a meeting place for members in years to come but, unlike the past, we aren't going to have to hike up from the top of Lonsdale to get to it!

The club has always been a place that welcomes all. From the earliest days of the club (Did you know that the club had a female vice president before women were allowed to vote in Canada?). But saying "All are welcome" isn't enough of a welcome mat. I see the club as a place that should be asking folks joining the club "What is it that you need to feel welcome?". It's a small change of perspective that has big impacts. For example, this past year saw the club's first Pride event – a day trip to Flora peak – which was well attended and a bucketful of fun. I hope there will be many more. But there are other ways to make change too. For example, there are also many club members whose native language isn't english. A small, easy to make change is for trip organizers to include any other languages they may be fluent in when posting a trip. It's an easy change that truly makes a big difference to those new club members – it helps them to find community in the club. And that's very likely why they joined the club.

Finally, I look forward to an amazing year ahead, filled with powder turns, hanging belays and fantastic conversation. I look forward to meeting you all. I hope we can share at least one day together – be it on rope, on skis, on snowshoes or, just on foot!

BCMC Expedition Grant

By Greg Hamilton

Thinking of doing a big trip this summer? The BCMC can help offset your expenses! The BCMC subsidizes expeditions, up to a maximum of **\$1,000.00**, that promote exploration, the sport of mountaineering and rock climbing, as well as provides a promotional value to the BCMC.

Criteria

1. The expedition/trip must be posted on the BCMC trip list, for BCMC Members only, mountain and/or outdoor related, remote and/ or difficult and/or unique in nature, primarily self-propelled (motorized access is okay), an expedition (typically long in duration by nature) and require participants to be extensively prepared in their training and logistics
2. Guided trips, organized events or races, and charity events do not qualify.
3. Recipients are expected to make a presentation of their trip/expedition upon their return at an upcoming BCMC social event, and in the form of a written report for a BCMC publication.

Application

Applicants for the BCMC Expedition Subsidy are required to submit the following information exec@bcmc.ca:

- An introduction to the expedition organizer and/or participants including their relevant background, qualifications, and experience
- A trip summary (one paragraph) including the trip title, an overview of the objective, the expected start and end dates, and location
- A detailed trip description including more detail on each of the trip summary items, an overview of your itinerary, and an explanation of why your trip is interesting or unique
- A description of known risks and how your team is committed to a safe expedition
- Your anticipated budget for the expedition
- Your plans to present your trip to the club upon your return; it is expected, at a minimum, that this will include a photo essay-style trip report or video blog and a presentation at an upcoming social event; however, if you have another creative medium to communicate with and inspire the club membership then please feel free to suggest. Your creativity on this item could win some major "points" with the selection committee.

Selection & Deadlines

Approval and selection for the Expedition Subsidy Program is to be made by the BCMC Board of Directors with a majority vote. The successful expedition will be made based on the information

presented in the Application package with a focus on the nature of the trip and what you can provide to the club upon your return.

Applications are accepted on an open basis.

Watersprite Lake Visitors List

By David Scanlon

The Watersprite Lake Cabin has become somewhat of a global destination it seems! Here's a list of visiting countries in the last year:

- Queenstown, New Zealand
- Gatineau, Quebec
- Mission, Alberta
- Montreal, Quebec
- Peterborough, Ontario
- Waterloo Ontario
- Kamloops, BC x 2
- Bothell, Washington
- Seattle, Washington x 7
- Portland, Oregon x3
- Okotoks, Alberta
- North Carolina
- Washington DC
- Arcata, Alabama
- Gurnee, Alabama.
- Bellingham, Washington x2
- Edmunds, Washington
- Athabasca, Alberta
- Bend, Oregon
- Brackley, United Kingdom
- Basking Ridge, New Jersey
- Delta, Alberta
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- Oakville, Alberta
- Thunder Bay, Ontario
- Mundelein, Illinois
- Amsterdam, Holland x2
- San Francisco, California x2
- Rhode Island
- Toronto, Ontario
- Corvallis, Oregon
- Stalbert, Alberta
- Bremerton, Washington x2
- Herriman, Utah
- Roseneath, Ontario



VIMFF is Back

By Ivan Hughes

We are proud to partner with VIMFF – Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival for the 2025 year. This February, the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival will showcase more than 60 thought-provoking and action-packed, mountain films.

In 7 venues around Vancouver and Squamish from February 21 – March 4, you'll hear from accomplished guest speakers, take part in filmmaking, photography, and outdoor education workshops and watch impactful stories from filmmakers from around the world.

Or stream the festival online from February 21 – March 23, to enjoy mountain films from home, anywhere in the world.

Get 15% off your tickets with the exclusive discount code: **BCMCFILMS**

Get your tickets at vimff.org.



The banner features a green diagonal background on the left with white text. The right side shows a photograph of a snow-capped mountain peak with a climber on a ridge. The text on the green background includes the festival name, dates for in-person and online events, and a 'GET TICKETS' button with a right-pointing arrow. A vertical photo credit 'PHOTO: CODY SHIMIZU' is on the right edge of the image.

(28th) ANNUAL VIMFF
VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL
**MOUNTAIN
FILM FESTIVAL**

—
IN-PERSON
FEB 21 — MAR 4 / 2025
ONLINE
FEB 21 — MAR 23 / 2025

GET TICKETS >

PHOTO: CODY SHIMIZU

Advocacy Updates

By Paul Kubik

Manning Park

The BCMC has a volunteers partnership agreement with BC Parks, which I administer on behalf of the club. We are authorized to work on a number of park trails: Fat Dog, Kelley, Mon 83, Windy Joe, East Similkameen.

Fat Dog trail: The BCMC replaced a footbridge at the bottom of the chute with the hard 90-degree creek crossing at its base. Funding of \$5,000 was obtained from the mountain foundation. We had lots of volunteer help from Friends of Manning Park. BC Parks employed a mechanical brusher to brush out the road for 6 kilometres. BCMC last fall cleared back the worst of the slide alder that was falling in on the trail. Still quite a bit of work remains.

Mount Kelley trail: was brushed from the highway to the top of the old telecommunications access road where it levels off.

Monument 83 trail: cleared to about 6K but new trees have fallen this winter. Access is still difficult as two crucial footbridges were washed out in 2021.

Heather trail: The mountain foundation funded \$10K of drainage improvements to this popular trail leading to Three Brothers Mountain.

Poland Lake backcountry access corridor: I'm meeting on Wednesday, February 5th with the assistant deputy minister to ask about the BAC. There are multiple problems with access and commitments by the resort and BC Parks have left the route in limbo.

Windy Joe: recently cleared of deadfall.

Sigurd/Tantalus

The BCMC has a volunteers partnership agreement with BC Parks, which I administer on behalf of the club along with Andrew Wong.

We again visited the footbridge site with BC Parks. We continue to be stalled by the requirement of First Nations consultation. I also visited Sigurd Lake with two park rangers. They seem keen on building a campsite at the lake. There is currently no trail to the lake.

We scheduled a work party to clear the trail last summer but it was denied permission due to wildfire hazard. We will try again in 2025.

Blackcomb Glacier

We got the province to recognize that uphill travel is a legitimate park use. We are waiting for the formal snow safety plan to be approved.

Watersprite Lake

We are working on establishing a hiking trail from the campground at the lake to the col with Crawford Creek.

Howe Sound Crest Trail

We had a work party last summer based out of the Sky Pilot camp at the head of Britannia Creek. RSTBC denied permission to continue the trail into Shannon Basin due to concerns about mountain goats.

Spearhead Summer Trail

Our freedom of information request found a relevant environmental assessment of the trail. It revealed that the trail will have significant impact on mountain goats and other natural values. It puts BC Parks in a dilemma. Sacrifice goats for recreation or preserve goats and sacrifice the trail. It's an interesting situation because of the quick decision that was made against extending the Howe Sound Crest trail into Shannon Basin. That would have cut through 200 meters of goat habitat. The Spearhead trail would cut through almost 6 kilometers of moderate to high value goat habitat.

The Spearhead Range heli-skiing permit is due for renewal this year by BC Parks. Will they give heli-skiing another ten years? It's a gross violation of the province's own regulations against heli-skiing in or near goat range. Economic interests prevailed ten years ago. Will we continue to see two sets of rules on preserving goats? One set for hiking trails, which means no trails in or near goat winter range. A second set of rules for powerful economic interests that supports jobs, tourism, greenhouse gas emissions, and provincial revenue.

It will be interesting to see if BC Parks approves the Spearhead trail as it was suggested by their hired consultant, Arthur de Jong of Whistler. If it goes ahead as planned, there are bound to be some mental contortions that should be marvellous to behold. Same for the heli-skiing permit renewal.

Pinecone/Burke Provincial Park

The management plan continues to be stalled. The official reason is that land issues near Widgeon Slough have still not been resolved. We've heard from senior bureaucrats that park plans are being shelved, at least those that did not have sufficient First Nations consultation. And, resources don't exist to complete any park management plan. What seems to be in the realm of possibility are facilities plans and visitor use management strategies. When I asked BC Parks if we could at least get a facilities plan for the northern end of the park, where there a little or no First Nations' unsolved questions, I was told that BC Parks needs to engage more deeply with Katzie and Squamish nations. We've been waiting for more than a decade of consultations to conclude during which time no facilities have been planned despite the obvious need. The province can't even decide on where access to the park should occur.

Baden Powell

We've had five years of work on restoring 1500 meters of trail leading to the club's Norman Deacon hut on Hollyburn Ridge.

Elsewhere

The Varsity Outdoor Club of UBC is having a major problem accessing the Harrison Hut near Overseer. There are ongoing talks with Lil'wat nation and the province. They are dealing with forestry road closures to protect grizzly bears and the hot springs from over use. Also, logging roads come and go. Their previous access road to the trailhead is now gated at Lillooet River.

Winter Mentorship Program

By Shashi Shanbhag

The BCMC would like to give an extra thank you to all of the members who are volunteering as Mentors for the Winter 2024-25 season. Thanks to these Mentors we are able to support 86 Mentees this season – our biggest cohort since the launch of the mentorship program four years back.

Anton Perepelytsia

John Garrett

Chris Hossie

Marie Amante

Colin Gara

Martin Schwarze

Colin Smith

Maysa Tsang

Danielle Arnott

Nicola Fameli

Danielle Trice

Peter Aird

Dominic Liao-McPherson

Safder Raza

Eileen Bistrisky

Sam Newmark

Frane Kozemelj

Scott McLean

Holly

Trevor Short

Jack Casey

Tye Pellichero

Johannes Esterle

Whitney Carson

Without your contributions this would not be possible!

Op-Eds

My BCMC Journey

By David Scanlon

Joined the BCMC on January 3rd, 1995. Joined executive 2001. My Executive positions have been: Camps Director, Cabins and Trails Director, President twice (asked to come back for a second term). Been vice president for many years and I am now an at large director.

Trails

- The 1st trail I worked on was the Baby Munday trail.
- Worked years keeping the original north Creek cabin trail open.
- Blazed the new trail to the North Creek Cabin on the east side of the creek.
- Worked on many routes up and out from the North Creek Cabin.
- Opened up the new route to the BCMC's Mountain Lake Cabin
- Worked months and years on the Watersprite trail.
- Blazed the new Demon Peak Trail.
- Put up trail posts towards Martin Peak.

Outhouses

- Had a 2 week summer mountaineering camp at the BCMC's Plummer Hut. I had a toilet flown in and built on site (Peter Woodsworth designed it)
- Built a new outhouse at the BCMC's north Creek cabin.
- Helped to rebuild the mountain Lake outhouse.
- Helped to build the outhouse at the Watersprite Lake trailhead.



Representing the BCMC

- Represented the BCMC at VIMFF events for some 24 years.
- Took 4 years organizing the BCMC's 2007 Centennial celebrations.
- Tried to reinvent the BCMC's banquet tradition in 2019. It was a small success.
- Represented the BCMC on the Spearhead Hut society for 10 years.
- Acquired a Cabin tenure for the North Creek cabin.
- Acquired a cabin tenure for the Mountain Lake hut.
- Acquired a tenure for the Watersprite cabin.

Contracts

- Going back to 2007 for the BCMC Centennial.
- Contracts signed with Grouse Mountain for the BCMC Centennial.
- Same for the 2019 Grouse Banquet.
- Multiple contracts signed with Gastown Printers.
- Same for Hemlock printers.
- Multiple contracts signed with Creative insignia T-shirts.
- Signed multiple contracts with Greystone Printers for 103 hikes, 109 walks, 105 hikes..
- Signed for the BCMC RSTBC trail personal partnership agreement.
- Signed the RSTBC BCMC Watersprite Trail partnership agreement.
- Signed a Lease for the New Norm Deacon cabin on Hollyburn.
- Arranged for and obtained the Inspection agreement for the Norm Deacon Cabin.

BCMC Cabin Work

- Participated in the removal and complete reconstruction of the North creek Cabin foundation.
- Worked with black Tusk Helicopters for the first time in flying in material for the Mountain Lake hut and flying out garbage.
- Gave the Plummer hut some TLC and reinforced its foundation.
- Built the Watersprite Cabin.

Current Work

- Working with Kirby Brown from the Sea to Sky gondola to get a trail from the gondola to the BCMC's mountain Lake Hut.
- Working towards getting an agreement with Black Tusk Helicopters for a set price to and from the BCMC's mountain Lake cabin from the Squamish airport.
- Am chairperson of the British Columbia Mountain Foundation.

- Watersprite Lake rec site provincial campground.
- Worked to get the Watersprite Lake rec site up and running.

Camps

- Numerous summer and winter camps.
- Both mountaineering and climbing camps.
- Camps in BC, Alberta, Yukon, Washington state.

Nominations

- Paul Kubik for honorary BCMC membership.
- Nominated John Baldwin for the BCMC honorary membership.
- Nominated Michael Feller for the BC Community award. It was awarded in 2014.
- Organized the celebration of life for Michael Feller.
- Had a new BCMC award made. The Michael Feller award of excellence.
- Presented Evelyn with the new Michael Feller Award of Excellence for Michael and Evelyn.

Articles

- <https://gripped.com/news/new-watersprite-lake-cabin-near-squamish-bcmc/>
- <https://www.mountainlifemedia.ca/2017/06/mind-hut-maker-david-scanlon-watersprite-lake-hut/>



The BCMC has been a monumental part of my life allowing me to form long lasting acquaintances and relationships.

Club GRMS Channel

By Greg Hamilton

If you've been backcountry skiing or doing any multi pitch rock climbing lately, you'll have noticed that pretty much every group is carrying at least 2 GRMS radios. Many ski groups are now one radio per party member. And the rate that the radios are being adopted by skiers and climbers is remarkable.... but then again they are a true game changer for intra-group communications. No more hand signals, shouts, or rope tugs needed. "Dropping!" is no longer shouted to the sky but rather spoken in hushed tones into the handset.

Well, I thought "Hey! Wouldn't it be great if all bcmc'ers were on the same Channel?" We could communicate across groups (think University Wall to the Apron or Cowboy Ridge to Flute) with ease. Imagine the conversations possible between groups: " See you at Dusty's for Apres!" or "Want to meet for lunch?" This "BCMC GRS channel" would also amp up the safety factor a teeny bit if you are backcountry skiing in a small group. Maybe assistance isn't as far away as you think.

Well, it turns out that there are many in the club that are thinking the same thing. And some of us are trending towards a single frequency. But the channel that folks are using isn't connected to the club in a meaningful way. However, there is a very wise club member who thought that channel 19, privacy code 07 should be "the" BCMC channel.

So, if you want to reach me in the field, try Channel 19 privacy code 07. As in 1907. Which is a pretty darn good year for the BCMC. (it was the year the club was founded). If you are on a club trip, please use that channel. Many thanks to the very wise Winifred Swatschek for the channel suggestion.

The Deepest of Forests

By Chris Ludwig

Rain can push through
the thickest canopy
spill into a night
of heavy soaked gear
and clammy clothes

spongy ground
and glistening moss
a constant sound
everywhere
punctuated by leaf and splatter

so still
when the others
are driven away

alone and here
with only my thoughts

in this deepest of forests

Did You Know?

By Glenn Woodsworth

Phyllis's Engine, a large rock tower on Castle Towers in Garibaldi Park, is not named for Phyllis Munday, as many people think. It is named for early BCMC member Phyllis Dyke (later Beltz) who, on a BCMC trip, thought the rough-hewn pinnacles and spires resembled a 19th century steam locomotive.

She married club member Ed Beltz, and they spent many years overseas. In later years Phyllis had a cabin on Hollyburn, not too far from the BCMC's Norm Deacon cabin, where she welcomed visitors. This was long before the current road was built. She led occasional trips to Hollyburn and Strachan into the 1960s and remained a BCMC member until her death in 1974. Phyllis's son, John Beltz, was a club member for many decades. He inherited his mother's cabin on Hollyburn. A lawyer by profession, John was active in the movement to stop logging in Cypress Bowl.



Phyllis Beltz (seated) at Tenquille Lake, 1946. BCMC photo collection.



Photo by Francis Bailey

Trip Reports

Stadium Glacier Ski Trip – January 5th

By Tim Aske

A great day out with a group of 6. Everything was super-easy along the Shannon Creek road as expected (in both directions). The ascent from Shannon Creek Valley to the ridge was difficult. Two of us boot packed, and one person put on ski crampons. Generally, the skinning everywhere was quite slippery. The ascent was easier after getting out of the Shannon Creek Valley.

We made it to the middle of the "Stadium Glacier" ski descent. The initial ski down was fantastic: fresh dry snow. Further down, many people had skied "Stadium Gully", making it harder skiing. The ski back into Shannon Creek Valley was hard. Those of us who followed "Home Run" down, right-of-the-creek, had a better time. *(All references in "" per the Carter & Stevens map.)*

Debrief on the Sea to Sky Gondola patio with Hot Toddy to finish it off.

Nursery Peak – January 25th

By Sarah Ries

I've been wanting to get out here since seeing Steve's report last year for a high value, modest effort trip. Plus the unusually good FSR access currently made it a good time to go.

Recruited Nico, since the roads were supposedly the crux and his 4runner is mega lifted. In my opinion it was not any worse than typical SWBC FSR water bars, definitely high clearance 4WD but we didn't have to get out of the truck at any point. Thin crusty snow at the spur, we parked 700 m past where Steve's track starts.



We definitely had a lot more snow than their report last year, continuous from the truck other than patches of dryish forest lower down. The snow was much more powdery than what I have experienced close to the coast this last week. As soon as we hit more northern aspects just before the cirque it was sustained trail breaking to the summit. Due to the poorly consolidated conditions we could only sustain a low angle before sliding so we ended up adding ~4 km distance on the way up from switch backs. But there were no real obstacles to gain

the upper cirque, we headed in the general direction they did and there was a ramp of continuous snow.

The east ramp to the summit was very fluffy and was not very supportive. Nico measured 65 deg and there were a couple spots which likely exceeded 70. I could kick many times and snow would continuously fall away in some areas, so it was quite the engaging progress. We had two ice axes but they had very little purchase and likely would not protect a fall, just helpful for balance. A fall would have most likely resulted in burial. We just wore boots on the way up, but I put my crampons on at the summit and was marginally more confident. But now that we've stomped the hell out of it, it probably goes a lot easier and overall was a quite chill day. Snowshoes from ramp to car with little faff except hitting the few wind affected hard slopes.



Really beautiful area and great way to end the green brick!

The Old Settler – Potential First Winter Ascent – January 29th

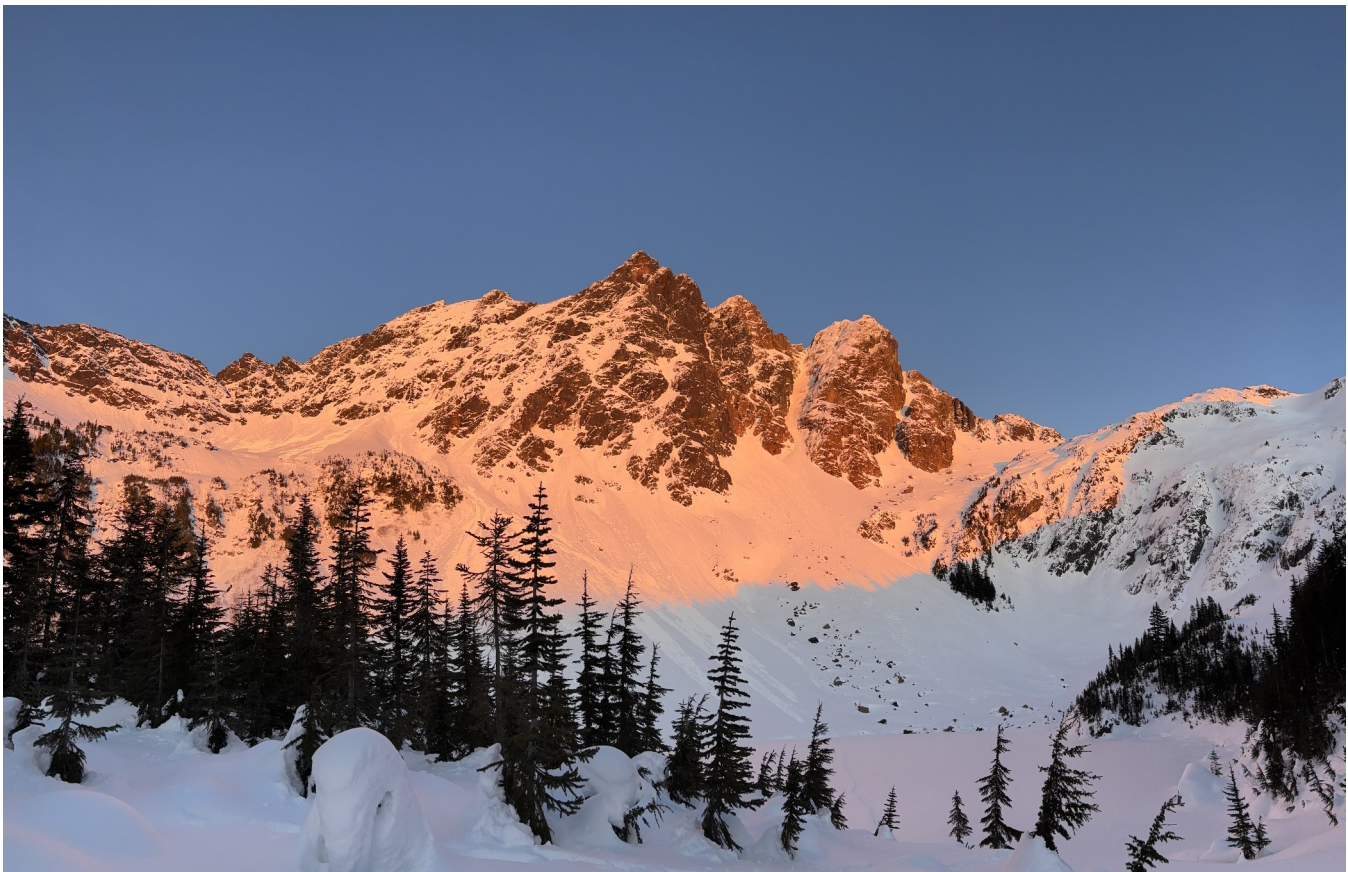
By Francis Bailey

The Old Settler is a rather iconic summit on the eastern side of Harrison Lake. It's host to some fabled and unique rock and is a popular climbing and scrambling objective as a result. Access is somewhat ephemeral, as the entrance can be gated for years at a time or be impassible altogether. In the last few years that has changed and the gate appears to be gone since 2023. Numerous trip reports have filled in since then and I bumped it on the list. I was initially tempted to climb the 5.8 route Mars Western, but after my friends came back with lack lustre reviews I put off any trips out there.

Summer transitioned to winter and I found myself in the midst of a long stable period of snow and weather. I was caught off guard and ill prepared for a mid January window like this. My otherwise

long list of ideas was coming up short. I spent most of my Thursday evening sleuthing around for something interesting when a comment From Drew Brayshaw on Bivouac caught my attention. It was dated from 2002, but it stated there had been no known winter ascent of The Old Settler. That surprised me a bit as it's a very iconic summit and not far off of Harrison. Although perhaps historic access issues had made a winter ascent a stretch in previous years. Not convinced, but certainly intrigued, I did some more searching through alpine journals and nothing came up. Now that doesn't mean that it hadn't been done, but there's an interesting mystery to unlock and that seemed like the perfect way to take advantage of these conditions.

Andrea had the weekend free as well and so we decided to hike in and camp overnight to give ourselves the best chance of summiting. Thanks to the high snow line we were able to drive quite far up and that made lugging our heavy packs a little bit easier. We set up camp at Daiphy Lake and spent the evening picking out a line. After testing out the snow, verifying the age of some nearby avalanche debris and looking through Andrea's monocular, we finally landed on the summer route as the best choice. The hope was the long running diagonal ramp across the west face would offer a not too steep line up to the ridge. From there it was likely to be at least one mixed pitch to gain the summit. However, that crux section is exposed 3rd class in the summer, so it seemed like a feasible option.

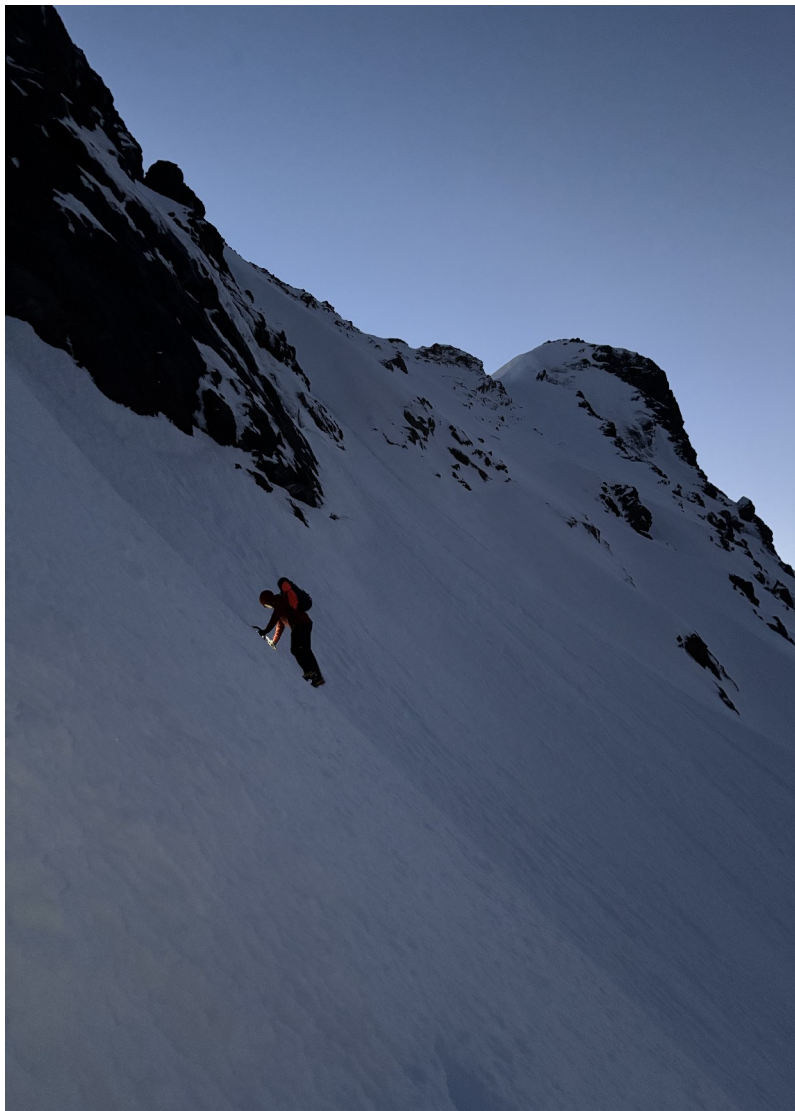


The major concern was the large steep slopes above the traversing ramp. We were both worried that under the afternoon sun it might send snow or debris down on us. The likelihood of a big avalanche was nearly 0, but it would only take something very small to knock us off on very exposed slopes. With that hazard top of mind, we set a very conservative turn around time. Ridge line by sunrise or turn back. Once the sun set, we finished up making dinner and settled in for a decently long night of sleep.

Alarms went off at 4am and we were marching up the slope an hour later. Unfortunately, the slopes to the base of the traversing ramp were quite foreshortened and we burned through too much of our time. We made it part way across the ramp and then had to call it off. Disappointingly, we returned to our camp site and mulled over our decision. We watched as the sun's reach left our areas of concern untouched; even by 10:30am. It was then we realized that we had turned around much too early. But that was our one shot and we had to head home. On the bright side, for an exposed line like we had chosen, it was better to play it safe and have been wrong than to have been stuck up there with the slopes actively falling apart.

I spent the next day or two watching the forecast and sure enough another window was forming. We had encountered perfect boot packing snow on our attempt and I just didn't think another summit bid would come again so easily. Especially given the ease of access with the high snow line. I had to make something happen and was ecstatic to find out that Brayden was willing to move some plans around to join me. Andrea unfortunately, did not have such flexibility, but she gave me her blessing to give it another attempt.

This time around, we'd go fast and light and we both had obligations in the afternoon so that meant a horrible early start. I'd leave Vancouver at midnight, pick Brayden up in Agassiz and we'd



drive on from there. I somehow managed to squeeze in an hour and a half of sleep and woke up with more energy than I expected. The drive was a breeze and by 4am we were marching up the familiar snowy section of road. Andrea and mine's boot track made for fast travel and we reached the lake just after 5am. It was still pitch black out and the huge west face was not visible to us yet.

From the lake we snowshoe'd up a little over half way and then ditched snowshoes for crampons. We headed up to the start of our traverse and changed gear for a final time before heading up the last remnants of the old tracks. Before long we were traversing on virgin snow and Brayden soon took over the lead; setting a brisk pace across the west face.

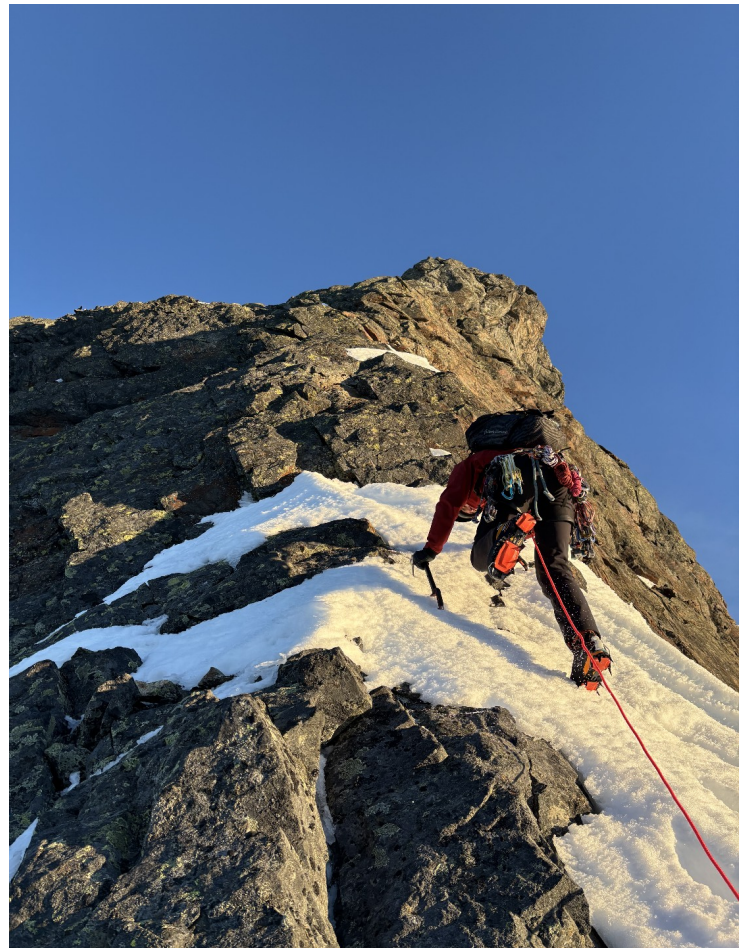
We followed the contours of the slope through sections of styrofoam snow, snice and generally all around perfect snow conditions. It never got all that steep but above and below us were huge cliffs and the exposure above Daiphy Lake was

awesome. As we neared the open section of ridge, the slope steepened and we boot straight up; weaving through a section of rocks on thin snow.

When we crested the ridge we were met with the first start of the sun rise; perfect timing! The light illuminated a heavily corniced ridge line to our right and the relatively dry crux pitch to our left. It looked to be in perfect condition. To reach the base of it, we had to make a few very exposed moves over a narrow gully and then it was an easy walk over. Brayden was keen to lead and I offered no resistance, so he racked up and set off. My belay stance was exposed to the gusty ridge top winds, but I managed to avoid freezing too much.

Brayden made quick work of the rock, snice and a finger of ice and I was soon following up. The crux proved to be not all that hard and I think we had the perfect mix of ice and rock to make it fun. Now above the crux, we coiled the rope up and traversed across the heavily corniced ridge line to the final summit block. I cut left along a bench and wrapped around to a steep snow slope on the other side which lead all the way to the top. Brayden joined and we were both standing on the summit shortly after. The views could have kept us there all day, but neither of us wanted to be caught out under warming slopes, so we spent little time waiting around.

We traversed back to the top of the crux pitch and built a rappel anchor in short order. Brayden descended first and then myself. The tag line came down with only a little manipulation of the blocker knot, but as we pulled the main rope the wind gnarled it into a mess on the east side. Brayden made several attempts to free it, but ended up pulling some huge blocks off the face instead. To get a bit closer, I put Brayden on belay and he traversed on snow and rock out to the rope. He gave several tugs; slipping once in the process and still the rope remained persistently stuck. I didn't like the idea of Brayden taking a fall for a stuck rope and offered that we just cut it, if it was truly stuck. In agreement, Brayden returned and gave one final heave. By some luck he yanked all of the loose rocks off and the rope was no longer pinned down.





At last we were heading down the traversing ramp, following our ascent steps as we did. The traverse back was uneventful, but tiring as we didn't bother stopping until we were away from any exposed upper slopes. We reached our gear stash just as the sun started hitting our descent line. At this point we just had to walk back to Daiphy Lake and we'd be out of harms way for good.

Once at the lake we spent a fair bit of time

taking in the west face and snacking on various candy combinations. Satisfied with our views, we returned to the forest and were back at the car in time to make our afternoon obligations.

There's still an outstanding question on whether this summit has had a winter ascent yet, but it was an amazing adventure nonetheless. While Andrea couldn't join us on the second try; it wouldn't have been possible without her and our previous attempt. Now the weather's closing in and I can finally take a rest!

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