

Dick Culbert on the summit of
Centaur Peak, June 19, 1964

Upcoming BCMC Social



Exploring the Ha-Iltzuk Icefield and Kapella Headwaters

February 10th, 2025 at the Anza Club

Francis Bailey is an active BCMC member that was awarded an expedition grant for 2025 for two separate trips. Francis explored the Ha-Iltzuk glacier in May with Calum Macdonald, Gabriel Robinson-Leith and Garrick Byers where they reached the top of 7 previously unclimbed peaks. In July Francis Bailey and Andrea Tate participated in a second trip to the Kapella Headwaters where they ascended 5 previously unclimbed peaks.

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editor@bcmc.ca

Submissions: We want you to write to 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: Dick Culbert on the summit of Centaur Peak, June 19, 1964. By Glenn Woodsworth.

Club Updates

Website Upgrades + Digitized Newsletters

By Francis Bailey

A number of important software upgrades were made to the bcmc.ca website over the course of January in order to prepare the site for an upcoming re-design. A best effort was made to retain the sites look and feel, while modernizing what's running under the hood. Despite that, a number of bugs and broken features appeared and I want to give a big thank you to all, for your patience, as those were tracked down and fixed. Another big thank you to anyone who took the time to submit or report these issues. The site appears to be running smoothly again, but the odd thing may crop up. Stay tuned for the re-design this year!

As a final note, more digitized BCMC Newsletters are trickling onto the website. This recent batch includes newsletters from 1981 and 1983. Dick Culbert's guidebooks have also been made available on the website and can be found here:

<https://bcmc.ca/m/docs/categories/Online+Books>.

Member Survey

By Ian Harris

The board has put together a short survey to help inform changes to our courses, trips, website and more. Help us shape the future of the BCMC by taking just a few minutes to fill it out! Members will also receive an email with a link to the survey in the coming week.

<https://forms.gle/7SxvFiXsHKe5qdN39>

From the Community

First Ascent of Serra V, June 1964

Glenn Woodsworth

This article first appeared in a slightly different form in *Alpinist* 92, published in January 2026. All photos are © by Glenn Woodsworth, unless otherwise credited.

"Do you want to do the prospecting thing again next summer?"

Dick Culbert was referring to 1962, when he and I and two others had received some money from the provincial government to look at areas of the Coast Mountains that were too rugged and difficult for most prospectors. It wasn't a scam, just a sweet way to partly finance a long summer of exploratory mountaineering and peak-bagging. And to honor the terms of the grant we had to prospect as we climbed: the two activities are not mutually exclusive.

Dick continued, "We never did get into the Waddington area, and Serra 5 needs climbing. If we don't get it soon, Fred Beckey probably will." That settled it. Late May 1964 found us leaving Vancouver in the "Tomato Soup Can," our rotting VW van, purchased with some funds from our latest prospecting grant of \$700 each. The van was stuffed with a couple of drums of aviation fuel and enough food and climbing gear to support the long summer we had planned.

After a week in the little-known mountains north of Bella Coola, we met friend and fellow BCMC member Roy Mason at Chilanko Lodge in the plateau country north of the Waddington Range. We were happy to unload the avgas, the weight of which was taxing our van. The plan was for Roy to fly us into the Scimitar Glacier in NZU, his Piper Super Cub plane on skis and wheels. We hoped to climb Serra Five, backpack through lesser-known parts of the Waddington Range, head north and climb in what we named the Pantheon Range and eventually hike out to our van in the Chilcotin, five or six weeks later.

During the next day or so of bad weather, we learned the Roy was also flying a strong Canadian-British party of four into the Rainy Knob area; they hoped to climb the unclimbed northwest ridge of Mount Waddington and Serra V. We knew these climbers by reputation, but we had only climbed with one of them. They were certainly more confident than we were, and they said, "You guys are strong scramblers and hill walkers, but you are out of your depth in this range. Leave the real mountains to real mountaineers." We didn't say much; what was there to say? But inwardly, I felt that there was some truth to the banter: I was certain of Dick's abilities, but I was uncertain as to mine. Years later I learned that Dick was uncertain about his abilities but had confidence in mine.



Roy Mason's Supercub NZU on the Scimitar Glacier, June 15, 1964. Threshold Pk behind.

My diary for June 15th, 1964 reads: "At last a day of decent weather. At 8 a.m. Roy flew me onto the Scimitar Glacier where it is joined by the Chaos Glacier. By 10 a.m. Dick had arrived and Roy took off to fly the other party." We packed enough food for a week and cached the rest on a large boulder where it would be easy to find, even in fog. Then we packed down the Scimitar and up the lower Radiant Glacier to where we had a good view of the Serras, Asperity and Tiedeman.

We were appalled at how wintery and plastered with snow the peaks looked. Dick wrote in the Varsity Outdoor Club Journal, "The records for rainfall and low average temperatures set by coastal weather in the summer of 1964 were suitably introduced by a wet spring and late runoff." We were clearly at least two weeks too early for the big peaks. We had planned for an early season trip, mainly because we knew that, at 3590 metres, Serra Five was the highest unclimbed peak in provincial Canada and other climbers were interested in it. But there we were, in mid-June, with nothing to do but make the best of it. We spent a couple of hours discussing a route for tomorrow's attempt. In Vancouver, what photos we could find suggested that the best and safest route might be up and over Mounts Tiedemann and Asperity, but that would probably require a couple of nights out. With the abundant snow cover, the Radiant headwall looked feasible, and that was the route we chose.



Above the lower Radiant icefall and our first view of the big peaks above the Radiant headwall. Mt. Tiedemann is on the extreme right, with Asperity to its left with wispy clouds. Serra 5 is left of the "low" col; Serra 4 (small pointy rock spike) is to the left. Serra 3 is directly above Dick's head and in this view appears to be the highest. Note the high-tech, back-breaking Trapper Nelson packs and the state-of-the-art wooden ice-axes.

We camped that night on the flat part of the Radiant at about 2100 metres, well away from any possible avalanches from the peaks above.

We were away at 5 a.m. There was no wind, no cloud or mist on the peaks or in the valley and, best of all, there was no high cirrus. We were cautiously optimistic: maybe we were in for an extended spell of good weather. The fresh snow on the lower part of the Radiant icefall was knee-deep slush, very tiring to plow through. Part way up the icefall, the snow conditions improved and we made better time. The huge ice walls above us and beneath the Asperity-Serra Five col looked bigger and more unstable the higher we got. We moved right, out of the line of fire from the ice cliffs, and climbed a couple of leads up hard, laminated ice in a gully to some rocks and a shaky belay. As was the norm throughout our climbing partnership, I usually lead the ice and steep snow, while Dick took the steep rock. Both thought we got the better part of the bargain. After one more lead on ice the angle eased back and we were at the col. Through a break in the clouds we could see the tent of the other party far below on the Tiedemann Glacier.

We didn't have any time to rest, though, as a storm was rapidly moving in, and already it was snowing on Waddington and Mt. Munday. The summit tower consisted of superb rock, and the first two leads went well—but then the snow arrived. Dick wrote, "Light slides of new snow hiss around us in the mists as Dick leads on up the face, using crampons to bite through snow into the verglas beneath. Let us just say it was "hairy," - perhaps more dangerous than difficult."

When we reached the summit at 8 p.m. the blizzard was in full swing. "Chalk one up for the hill-



Serra V summit tower from the Serra-Asperity col.

3000 ft. of icefall in a whiteout, and- finally we must locate a small tent on a large glacier in the fog. Comes the dawn and we must look like a couple of frost heaves on the ridge."

It snowed all night and all the next day, but the wind abated. We were hit by several powder snow avalanches in the ice gully, one of which we had to jump into a 'schrund to escape. Shortly after we started down the main icefall I dropped into a crevasse. Dick was holding the belay and couldn't help me, and it took half an hour and all my strength to get out. In the lower part of the icefall, the trough we had plowed with such effort on the ascent was still visible and gave us a fast route down to the flat part of the Radiant. By this time the fog had lifted, and we had no problem finding our tent. The descent from the col had taken the same time as the ascent. We had a bit of dinner and crawled into our sleeping bags.

The following day we didn't wake up until mid-afternoon. Our headaches and worries were gone and so was the storm. Late in the afternoon we took advantage of the sunshine to wander up easy Chaos Peak above camp. The views were outstanding. Our route on the Radiant headwall had been completely scoured by avalanches and by a huge chunk of ice that had fallen from the headwall; we were highly aware of just how lucky we had been. It was cool on top of Chaos, so we didn't stay long, but we could see peak after peak to the north, including some unclimbed, that we hoped to attempt in the next month or so. But they could wait: this expedition was just beginning, and it was time to get back to camp.



A few days after Serra V, we climbed Unicorn Mountain and Centaur Peak on the other side of the Radiant. This photo, from the summit of Unicorn Mtn., shows Tiedemann on the right, Asperity in centre. Serra V is the sunlight blade left of the Asperity-Serra col, then black spiky Serra IV, then Serra III and (on left) Serra II (dark). Our route on Serra V ascended the broken glacier just right of the rocks in the foreground and climbed the headwall beneath Asperity to the col.

FIFTY YEARS LATER DICK CULBERT and I sat in his living room amid artifacts from his travels around the world and discussed the climb. We thought that, although the up-and-over Tiedemann route was objectively safer, we probably wouldn't have made the summit, given the weather over the next couple of days. We both agreed that our route, despite the strong objective hazards, was a justifiable choice, because we did the climb and survived to talk about it in Dick's living room. To us, at that time and at that age, the prize was worth the risk.



View northwest from our camp on the Radiant Glacier. Mt Cornelia is the big pyramid on the left, with the double rock peak to its right being Frontier. Umbra Peak is in the middle distance, above the person. Delusion Peak is on the right, with Pocket Valley above the tent.

More interesting to me was our discussion on first ascent mania and why we got caught up in it. Neither of us considered ourselves to be particularly competitive by nature, and it remained a mystery to us as to why we, both mainly exploratory mountaineers, got pulled into that game.

Regardless, we thought that our route on Serra Five, although it may have been the "correct" line at the time, was never likely to become a popular line. As with the 1939 first ascent route on Mount Tiedemann, it is likely to be relegated to the status of "for historical interest only, not recommended under modern conditions."

1985 Waddington Traverse

By Peter Croft

After the 1964 ascent, Serra V was left alone for 21 years, when the very strong party of Don Serl, Greg Foweraker and Peter Croft climbed it/ The Waddington Traverse, from Mt. Waddington to the Tellot Hut is one of the greatest climbs that has been done in Canada.

This article first appeared in in Alpinist 92, published in January 2026. We are grateful to Peter Croft for allowing us to reprint it here.

They called it the Mystery Mountain because just a hundred years ago it was a blank spot on the map. It was still a mystery to me when, in 1985, my best friend Greg Foweraker blurted out the idea of not just climbing Mt. Waddington, but traversing the range. I leapt at the idea like I leapt at all things climbing. Then, a couple weeks later Don Serl, the acknowledged King of the Coast Range, suggested to me the same thing—without thinking, I leapt again. Like a teenager at an all-you-can-eat buffet I often gave a kneejerk yes to everything; now I'd have to break my word to one of them and say no. So, the Waddington Traverse didn't begin with psyching up for an epic climb or planning an alpine strategy, rather, it started with the difficult task of figuring out how not to be an asshole. After all, what's worse: slapping a hero in the face? Or betraying your best friend?

Swallowing my self loathing, I spoke to Don about my dilemma. Without missing a beat, he broke into a wide, easy smile. At first his simple logic (two plus one equals three, or something like that) proved too tough for me. After all, rock climbing as a party of three practically ensured a slow motion junk show. But Don added up the pluses, figuring we'd still only need one tent, one stove, one rack and two ropes. Even with my limited math skills I could grasp that more bodies meant lighter packs. Plus, we planned to solo most of the terrain, meaning the pitfalls of having three people on a rope would rarely be an issue. Within a minute, the heavy load of my blunder was sluffed off, transformed into the weightlessness of my own divine foresight.

Chopping into these mountains was a jaw dropping mind bender. Other peaks I'd visited possessed proud frontal faces but were usually paired with embarrassingly unspectacular backsides. Here, though, were about ten summits strung out along a continuous crest, waterfalls of exposure bigger than anything in Yosemite plunging down gigantic granite buttresses and blue streaked ice faces. We all drank in the spectacle but I failed to fully appreciate the remoteness, how cut off we would be in case of an epic or emergency. This was back in the last century, before backcountry radio technology became normal and before I had much of a clue about anything. There would be no live streaming our heroics if things went well and no rescue until we were well overdue if things went bad. I, however, was in my twenties and of course believed that my good luck was a constant throughout my universe. And at first, I was right.

When we stepped out onto the snow it was mid afternoon, sunny and calm, not a hint of the legendary stormy mountain range my friends and books had warned me about. It felt like Squamish on a nice day—except for the glaciers and the fact that I couldn't see any green trees,

even in the far distance. And that, if we did have to try to walk out to civilization, I had no idea which way to go or how long it would take. Actually, I realized, it was nothing like Squamish.

As our trip got underway, I knew I was lucky to have the partners I did. Greg and I had been friends and climbed together since just out of highschool. He was far smarter than me but never pointed it out and was kinder and more generous than anyone I knew. The worst thing I think I ever saw him do was hog all the Sugar Frosted Flakes. And if laughing and doing stupid stuff was a sport he and I would be Olympians. Don, on the other hand, was more serious and perhaps a little bit of a father figure—I don't even think he smoked weed. With him, I'd been caught in an avalanche in the mountains above Vancouver and endured a stormy Himalayan bivouac with no bivi gear, somehow surviving both experiences. Nothing seemed to faze him, or at least not the way it scared the crap out of me. Greg, a fun-hog like myself and Don, the mountain sage. So, for various reasons in a weird combination—my floundering attempts at forming a plan and the random patterns of chaos theory—I had found myself in the perfect place, the perfect space.

The next morning we reached the top of Mt. Waddington. After all the stories of epic failures, the route to its spiky summit seemed practically pedestrian. True, it was steep and festooned with Patagonia-style rime ice, but even as I soloed it in clumsy plastic boots, it was all hero climbing; spectacular but easy. This had little to do with our ability but rather with what had to be the best conditions in a hundred years. We napped soundly, as if in a coma, in warm sunshine before descending. Our luck continued through that day and the next, summiting the granite Mounts of Combatant and then Tiedemann, where we bivied. Everything was going so well we decided to jettison more than half our food there. Soups and noodles (all stuff that's supposed to be good for you) got stuffed into the summit cairn. The Halloween candy we kept. We were flying high, on top of the world, unstoppable—until we woke up the next morning. I sat up and glanced at Greg, who did not look good. Vomit puddles haloed the area around his makeshift pillow and after a night of barfing he was now reduced to dry heaving. We were as close to the middle of nowhere as I'd ever been and it sunk in hard that I had no clue what to do if he continued to circle the drain.

After a morning of hanging out hoping Greg's condition would improve, our wishes came true, or at least he said he was good enough to continue. So we carried on, over Asperity, and then made a long descending traverse across a hanging glacier. It was not too difficult but horribly exposed, with thousands of feet to the glacier below. I was keeping tabs on Greg when I heard Don shout "Watch out!" A two foot chunk of ice had cut loose from the ridge above and was now cartwheeling toward us. At the last moment, Don tried to dive out of the way but a bad bounce sent the slab of ice after him and clipped him hard in the shoulder, almost sending him over the edge. Regrouping, I saw that his injuries were not nearly as bad as they might have been, but I still remember the close-call look in his eyes.

It seemed like all of a sudden, after days of beautiful scenery, plenty of snacks and long midday naps waiting for the snow to firm up, it was time to pay our dues. Greg and Don were hopefully all paid up and I now had a sinking feeling that I was next as I watched the sky turn from robins' egg blue to an ugly steel grey. What added to the general heebyjeeby-ness was that we were now entering the most remote part of the traverse and what we knew would likely be the crux: Serra 5, which had gone unclimbed since the first ascent decades ago.

It all started out so well; the granite was solid and straightforward, and even though the sky was still scowling at us, I started to believe we might just sneak it out before any nastiness happened. That was before we looked down the other side. If there was ever a poster child for the perils of descents, Serra 5 would be it for me. After a couple of rappels, we entered a zone of metamorphic horror. I actually have no idea what it consisted of; I think it had been granite once but had since been corrupted into something evil and deadly. I was leading the descent when, for lack of anchors, I swung way off to the left, eventually finding a lost arrow crack. After a few swings of pin pounding, cracks shot off in all directions, disappearing around the corner of the buttress, accompanied by a horrible hissing, grinding, whining sound. The whole cliff appeared to be on the verge of collapse. I kicked out and swung hard right, impacting a wide right facing corner with my right arm and shoulder, losing all my strength in my brake hand. Immediately I picked up speed, surely spurred on by my heavy pack. My bad luck was coupled with stupidity; I had no emergency prussic loop and no knots at the end of the ropes. As I accelerated, I flogged my hand against my thigh, trying to get some feeling going, and somehow...it worked. I clamped down on the strands and came to a stop ten feet from the dangling ends.

Finally I was able to make an anchor, and breathed a huge sigh of relief. But when Greg was about to start down, some blocks shifted and threatened to launch. They yelled to take cover but there was nowhere to go, nothing to do. "Get ready" they shouted. Get ready for what? To die? I was directly beneath them. And then they cut loose. Boulders the size of TVs and mini fridges rained down. I plastered in close to the wall and could feel the suction as my windbreaker cracked and whipped. Face against the rock, the only thing that saved me was the steepness; a hiccup or a sneeze and I would have been swept away.=

Once safely off the hellishness and on relatively flat ground, I refused to go any further. Greg's tummy and Don's shoulder seemed to have recovered but I was still jittery from my gulp of adrenaline. I needed to chill out—and started beating the crap out of the mountain. Whipping out my ice axe, I started hacking away at the moraine at our feet, carving out the bivi ledge I needed to recover. Now that we appeared out of the death zone the sky suddenly turned blue again. We had passed the gate keeper, paid the boatman. The next day we finished the Traverse, the final four peaks dessert climbing after the poisonous main course of the day before. Sitting at the Plummer Hut we stripped to our undies and basked in the sun (and the warm deliciousness of being alive).=

Coming from the crags of Squamish and Yosemite, where deciding factors simply revolve around fingers and toes, the Traverse felt more like a concentrated slice of life. Crux sequences played virtually no role in the difficulty of what we encountered. Rather, the crucial moments revolved around various freak show occurrences - the seriousness of our position that sunk in when Greg practically puked his heart out, the giant ice Frisbee that almost swept Don off the planet and my real life nightmare of a mountain that was just itching to fall down.

A Journey

By David Scanlon

Well it has come to pass that after 25 continuous years representing you, my fellow BCMC members, on the BCMC executive, the time has come.

As of the club's november 2025 AGM I am no longer on the BCMC's executive

Represented the BCMC at the VIMFF events for 2 decades

The BCMC's 2007 Centennial banquet.

Worked over 4 years on that. Were you there?

2009. The start of well over a decade representing the club on the Spearhead Hut Society board getting the Kees and Claire hut built. I still attend some meetings.

2006. Started leading multiple trips to Watersprite Lake.

Obtained a tenure to build a mountaineering cabin in 2009.

Got the cabin built in 2016 and have been looking after it since a year ago.

Another multi multi year project.

This after 2 tries in other areas to get a hut built.

2019. Hiked to Watersprite Lake with RSTBC's Alistair McCrone where the decision was made to make the area into a Provincial rec site.

Made trips to the lake with John Hawkins and Robert Vanderzam from RSTBC.

2019. started working with the District of west Vancouver to acquire the Norm Deacon Cabin on Hollyburn Mountain for the club.

I am now into year 7 on this.

Many summer camps, winter camps, weekend trips. The culmination of all of those camps and trips ended up with me being a part of a try to climb mount Logan.

We didn't summit but came close. I've always looked back on this with wonder. Why did I ever even try this? I was 60 at the time! That was now 18 years ago.

There have been so many club members that have been a part of all of these events that I'll not even try to name any because we'd be here all day.

At the end of the day I am so pleased to have been a part of all of these events.

Going forward I am still working to get the new Norm Deacon Hollyburn cabin up and operational. Unfortunately as we get closer to this end there have been a couple of things that are becoming challenging.

Realistically I don't see it becoming available for use until early this coming spring. This project started in 2019 making it a 7 year project.

I still get calls for information and help on other BCMC related events.

On an unrelated note I am still chair of the British Columbia Mountain Foundation.

As with most of us I cannot do what I used to do but try to keep my hand in events to help whenever I can.

Trip Reports

The editor is in need of more trip reports for future newsletters! Have an old trip you never got around to writing? We want to see it! Submit your reports to editor@bcmc.ca.

More Than Just Pulleys: Finding Community at Brockton Point

By Colin Gara

Late December 2025 brought a fresh blanket of snow to Mount Seymour, setting the perfect scene for a Rainbow Ramblers outing to Brockton Point. The Rainbow Ramblers, BCMC's first 2SLGBTQIA+ affinity group, hit the trails to blend collective learning, community and winter stoke in equal measure.

The goal of the day was skill-building, with a focus on crevasse rescue fundamentals. The group practiced setting a solid ski anchor and worked through both z-haul and drop loop systems, creating a low-pressure environment for learning and discussion. Those brand new to crevasse rescue were especially encouraged to join, with the aim of demystifying the systems and inspiring future skills development rather than mastering everything in a single day.

To keep the outing accessible, half the group traveled by snowshoes while the other half ski toured, proof that good mountain days don't have to be one-size-fits-all. Most importantly, the group had fun: learning together, laughing together, and building confidence alongside community. A snowy peak, new skills, and a welcoming crew made this Rainbow Ramblers trip a definite win!



Antelope Slot Canyon

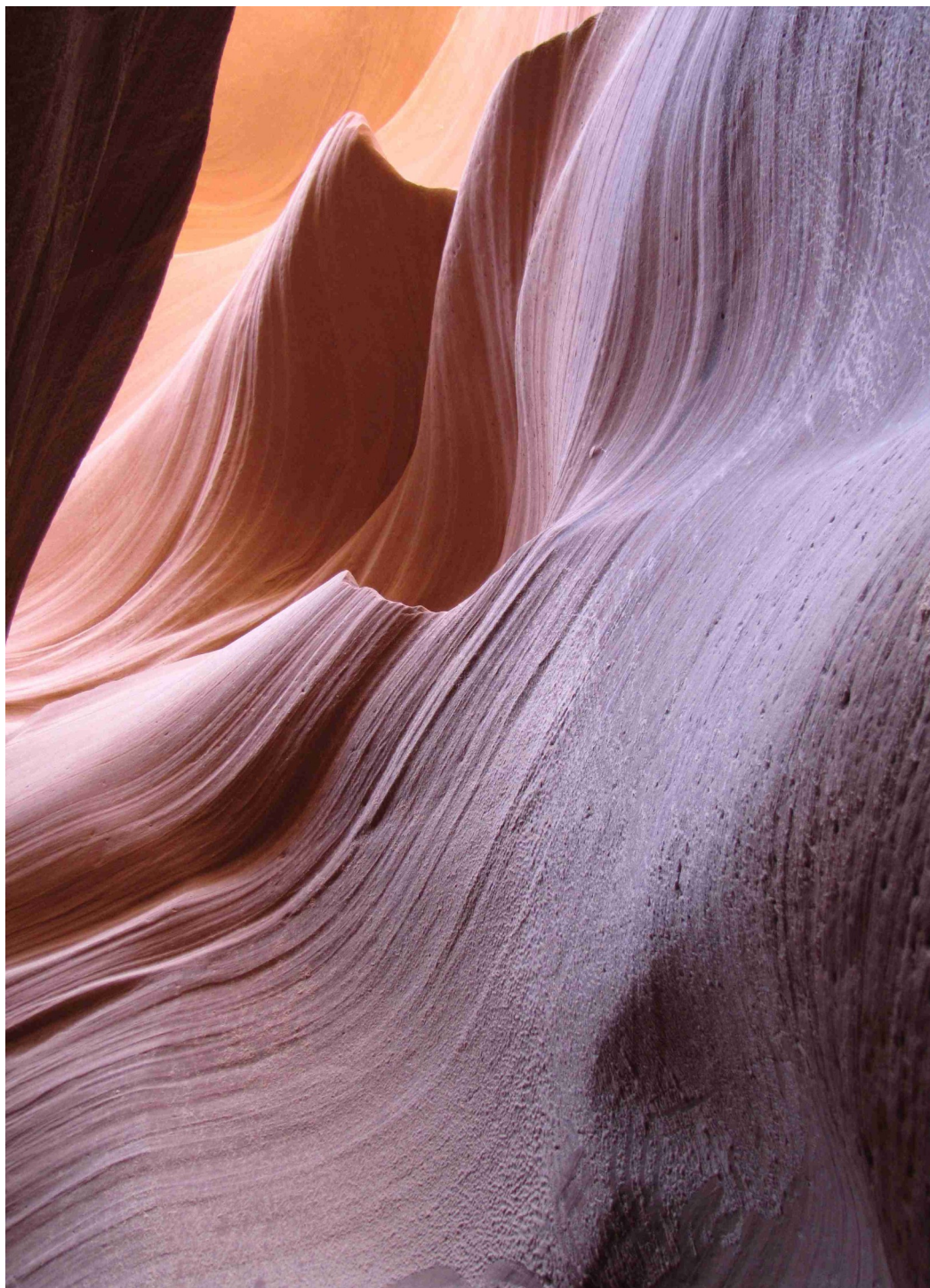
By Rick Sheppard

I've hiked many, many times in the past to a geological fantasyland located in the southwestern USA.....the Canyon Country in southern Utah and northern Arizona. The slick rock, basically limestone, has been sculpted by plate tectonics, water and wind for eons into an exotic fantasyland of towers, sinuous canyons, valleys and rock walls. In the past we couldn't stop driving down there and made the journey just about every year.....and would continue to do so except for now of course where all the current turmoil caused by a repugnant entity called Trump prevents that.....but we shall return! There's soooooo....much to experience that you could keep on returning every year for a life time! For now let's explore the sculpted Antelope Slot Canyon formed over millennia mainly by flood waters from the nearby mountains. By the way it is essential to check about the chance of flash floods(guaranteed to drown if you're caught in one) at one of the local BLM stations (Bureau of Land Management) which are located conveniently throughout the canyon country- they also offer many other services- topographic maps, pamphlets, and much more.



Antelope slot canyon is on Navajo land so they administer it, and charge a small fee to protect and improve the site- it was \$35 USD when we were there last- probably \$50 by now but totally worth it for the phantasmagorical experience of hiking around/below/ under all the sinuous folds of this stunning canyon. Best time to do it would be April, May and maybe into June before the unbearable heat hits. Time this to also to explore the nearby Bryce Canyon (actually an amphitheater) which is at 9300 feet, could still have snow in April.

Once the creature with the lizard brain departs the White House I would be glad to lead a BCMC trip down south to this wonderland!



Rainbow Range Adventure

By Stephen Hobbs

This article describes a near-miss and self rescue. Which are always worthwhile to read about, for those interested in risk management while in the mountains.

Tweedsmuir Park offers many Coastal Range backpacking opportunities. Many of these involve air support from: Tweedsmuir Air, White Saddle Air or West Coast Helicopters.

The Rainbow Range is featured in John Balwin's Coast Mountain High Routes (#28) and has a drive-up trail head, that is only a couple of hundred meters off Highway 20.



Not having to pay for air support was appealing. Particularly, not having to deal with the tight logistics of an air drop-in and later recovery. Which are often hampered by conditions. On prior trips, we had run out of food once, waiting to be picked up. Garmin InReach texting and now iPhone satellite texting keeps one connected to the air base, but it can be stressful none-the-less.

There is a good park trail for the first day or two into DeMacedo Lakes. This is the normal terminus for aggressive day hikers or weekend campers. With more time however, one can then climb over or traverse the first range and then cross Beef Creek to the range beyond. A satisfying one-week backpack with open views in every direction.



At the start we had a forest fire in the adjacent valley. It was behind a treeless range, so we proceeded as planned. A massive thunder-head-like column of smoke towered over us, which was concerning but manageable.



Things changed when there was a lightning storm. We saw the strike that started a fire (VA1845) near Octopus Lake, which was in our valley. Although 15 km away it was a threat. We were high in the alpine, so rationalized that no fire could get to us. Ominously we now had ash falling on the tents. Note the red sun in the photo and the band of smoke which seemed okay but was not okay.

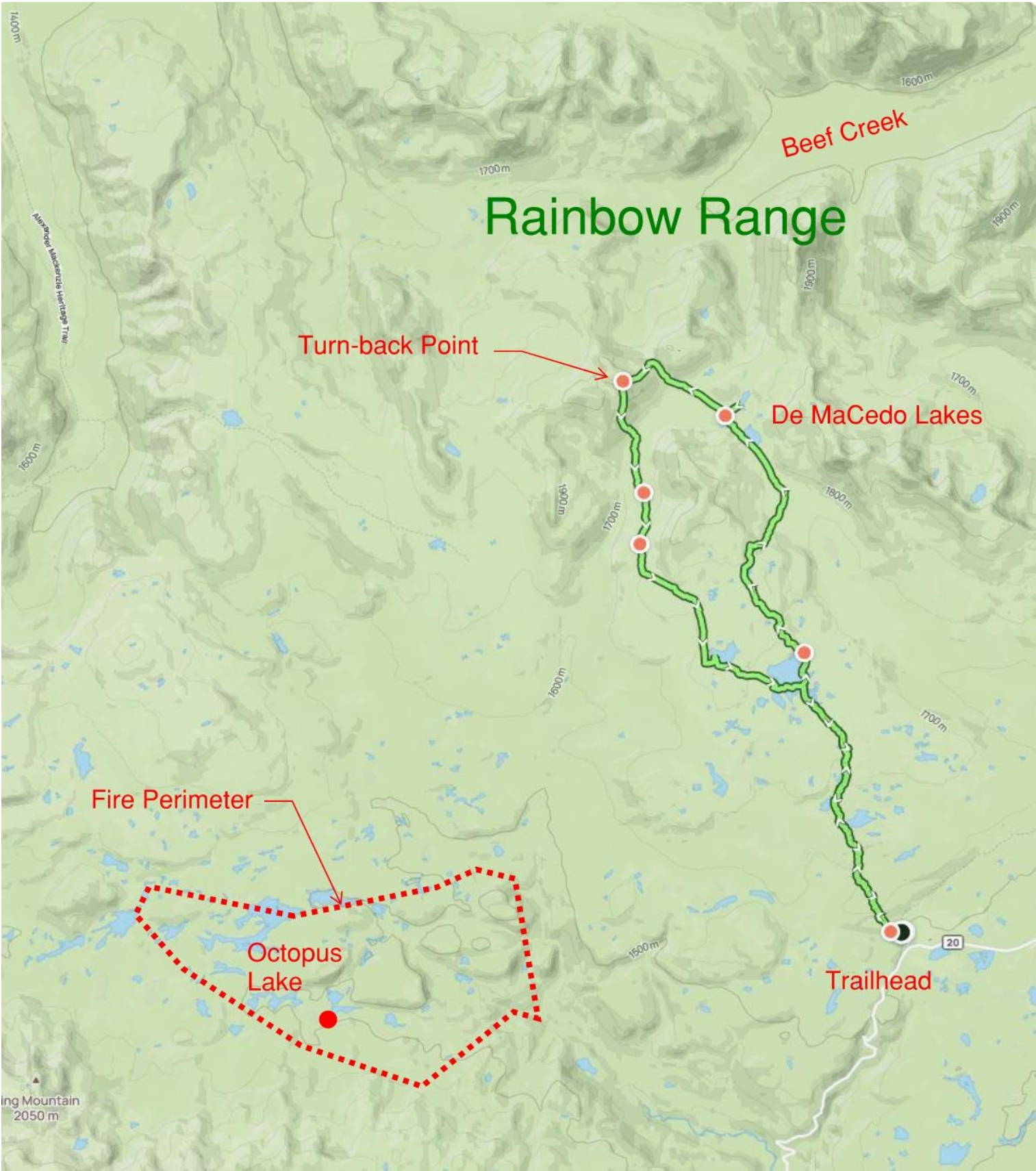


We stubbornly continued for a few hours but were continuously re-evaluating. They say in mountaineering it is not always what happens, but the decisions you make afterwards that determines how serious will be the outcome of an incident.

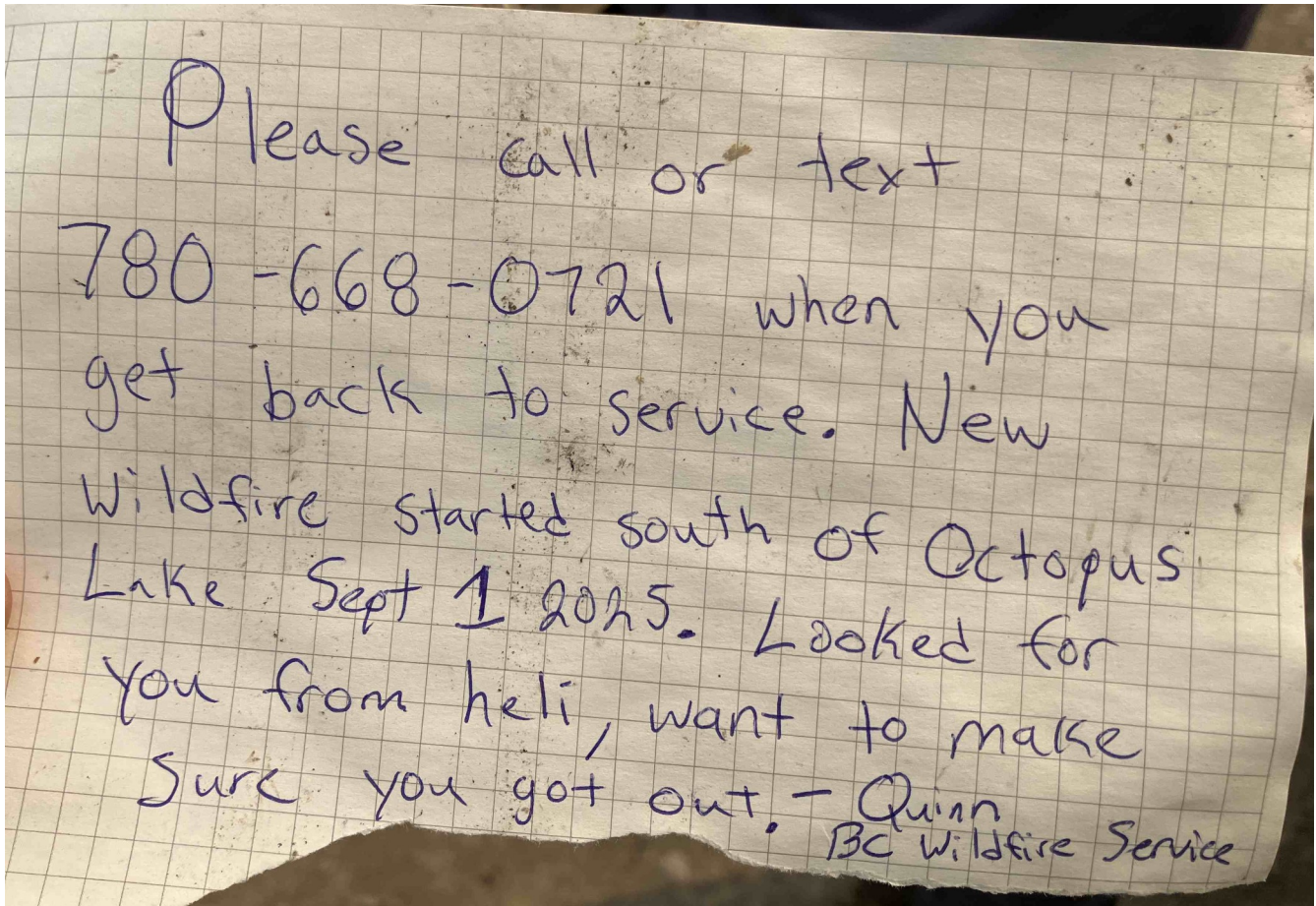
Achieving about 2000m elevation we were able to use our phones to get an update: the Park had been closed, including the trail we had used to hike in. Now two-and-a-half days in, we decided to terminate the plan and head out to the trailhead, via an interesting overland route. Our primary rational was not about getting hurt, but we were worried about others coming to look for us. Heading back to the car was the responsible decision.

That night we were halfway back but soon learned what the real risk was. At night the smoke layer descended, and we were coughing in our tents. Smoke, not flames, is the prevalent danger of forest fires.

Next morning, back on the trail, although smoky, we made good time and made it back to the car mid-day. The windshield had notices on it from: BC Wildfire, Bella Coola RCMP and the Anaheim Ranger also drove in to talk with us. All were concerned about our well being. And yes, they had come looking for us in the helicopter. We contacted all as instructed, once we were within cell range. And surprisingly the RCMP had opened a file on me! All generated from the license plate number.



Note that at that point all air support was grounded – no visibility. Had we been on a more remote air-supported hike, we would have had to wait at least a week to get back out (bring extra food).



Please call or text
780-668-0721 when you
get back to service. New
Wildfire started south of Octopus
Lake Sept 1 2025. Looked for
you from heli, want to make
sure you got out. - Quinn
BC Wildfire Service

We headed home and tracked the progress of the fire. It burned over the entire Octopus Lakes area, including the trails in that westerly area, which we had originally planned to use as a multi-day loop.

It took a couple of months to recover from the smoke inhalation.