

Tonquin Valley Backpack Trip

We headed out on June 27th and stayed at the hostel in Jasper so we could have an early start the following morning. The next morning a car shuttle was necessary as the trip was a circuit so we had to drop off a car near the Cavell Hostel. On the way back to the trail head our drivers saw a small black bear eating breakfast in the ditch. We started at the Portal Creek trail head and looked forward to about a 20 km hike to the Maccarib campsite. While we were preparing to start at the trail head, 2 guys headed out with 3 pre-saddled horses. They appeared to be in quite a hurry. Later on that morning we passed them heading back out with an extra guy. All seemed fine, but we never figured out where the extra guy came from. Maccarib Pass was a grunt, but we were able to cool off with a snow fight. Just before our first campsite we came to a big stream with no bridge in sight. Everyone got prepared to take off their boots to cross it. One of our group threw his boots across, but one of them hit a tree and bounced back into the fast flowing water. There was some mad scrambling to catch the boot before it got too far. Thankfully it was fished out of the water and other than being soaking wet, all proceeded pretty good. We had a welcoming committee of thousands of tiny mosquitoes. Good thing everyone brought lots of bug spray and netting to cover our heads. One important note that a few of our group learned was that one must lift the netting off your face before attempting to insert food or drink into one's mouth. It was hilarious to watch people try to eat without lifting the netting.

On our second day we found a bridge across the creek a couple hundred meters down from the infamous boot/fish crossing from the night before. Shortly after getting on the trail we had to don our raincoats. It ended up being a raincoat on and raincoat off kind of day which made it a nice break from relentless heat. We decided to take a detour into Tonquin Valley Lodge to see if we could get a cup of tea. One person had cash and another a credit card so we figured we were set. Our intel was that the lodge was open. But apparently they didn't expect us as no one was around, so we sat on their deck in comfy chairs and ate a midmorning snack instead. Further down the trail we went to check out Tonquin Valley Adventures and the only life there was a couple of marmots who disappeared shortly after our arrival. Here we took refuge on a covered deck to eat our lunch. The second half of our day included several detours to get around fast creeks and manoeuvring around swamps. Some places thankfully had boardwalks. We camped at Surprise Point on our second night. It was a 10 minute hike back to get water, so we filled up everything we could so we only had to do it once. While we did the water run, we were able to witness the fish trying to swim in the creek where the water wasn't very deep. It provided some nice entertainment. We also got to see a bald eagle that was in the area. There were very healthy mosquitoes at this location as well. This was the camp of distances, the water source was far away, and the tenting area was a good distance away from the cooking area too. Thankfully Mr. Lumpy had a great view! After supper we trekked down to the lake to

check out the views. It was difficult getting pictures as the blood sucking bugs were especially hungry.

On our third day we again opted for a side trip and headed up to Wates-Gibson Memorial ACC Hut. On route we went through a fantastic meadow with spectacular views. There was a peep patrol going through the meadow. A couple of sandpipers were not impressed with us being there and they vocalized their displeasure very loudly. We put one of our group through the 'High Stepping Psychological Test'. Unfortunately his response was somewhat delayed so he failed it miserably. Once out of the valley the trail had more elevation than we had anticipated from looking at the map, but it was well worth the exertion. The ACC Hut was nice and while there we also found a waterfall and the remains of an old cabin. All that was left of the cabin was the fireplace and the foundation. While taking a smaller group photo, one cheeky hiker took the photo, but had the camera backwards and took the photo of himself instead of the group. Thanks to another sharp group member his treachery was noticed and the shot was taken in the proper direction. After our side trip we took the trail to Astoria. It ended up being quite a challenging route and it slowed us down significantly. It was a true backcountry path that required us to crawl over and under many trees, navigating through swamp, locating disappearing trails, and some bouldering. It was GREAT! We weren't sure how many km's it was in total as the different maps, the trail signs and the GPS all had different numbers. Regardless, it was a fun and tiring experience. Another blessing for the day was that the Astoria campground had very few mosquitoes! YEAH! And Mr. Lumpy was missing but a throne was in his place. We also had to search for the food hang which was eventually found and the food was safely stored for the night.

Our last day was Canada Day. Our campsite was decorated with colorful flags to welcome the day. We also completed our breakfast with fireworks. The trail out was wide and even which made it short and fast. All of our packs proudly displayed the Canada flags as we hiked out. Our drivers again saw the only wildlife of the trip. This time it was 2 yearling black bears running down the road. We stopped in Jasper and enjoyed a lunch at the "Villa Caruso". The waiter figured two of our group members were his brothers from other mothers. We wanted to know how many of those he had. The lunch was an excellent way to end an amazing trip with a superb group of people. New friends were made and we have a new story to tell.