

Amory Adventure Award

Second Place Winner

Hiking the West Coast Trail with the 18th Red Deer (Alberta) Venturers

by Amy Corpe

"I found that the greatest part of hiking the West Coast Trail was to see things I have never seen before and feeling a sense of pride and sheer bliss when our group accomplished our goal. This trip brought the whole group closer together as life-long friends."

- Amy Corpe

On May 14, 2003, the 18th Red Deer Venturers departed for the hike of their lives. We said our goodbyes to family members, and with wishes of good luck the group piled into the van and headed off.

We arrived in Tawassin to catch the ferry at 5 a.m., after which we ate, packed up and took a tour bus to the trailhead where we would start our hike. Arriving quite late in the day, we would have to set up camp, since we would not be allowed on the trail itself till the morning. So we set up our tents and explored the grounds until supper. Bedtime was nine p.m.,



and we were tired but excited about the next day's hike.

In the morning we took a seminar on the West Coast Trail, to learn as much as we could – what we might possibly see, and what to avoid. With great anticipation we finally hit the trail at 10:30 a.m.

Day One – This hike was fairly easy, with some bridges, mud puddles, logs and rocks to be crossed. We



▲ **John Watson and the anchor of the Skagit.**

◀ **Teamwork in motion over the surge channels.**

were almost overwhelmed with excitement. Halfway through the day, we met at a watchtower for lunch – a beautiful sight. We could see bright blue waves crashing against the huge rocks below. At the end of this day, we set up our tents so we could relax and share our thoughts.

Day Two – Unlike the first day, in which we were a bit slow, everyone made great time. It was like we were

**Limbo,
anyone?
Riley
Wilson
navigates
a huge
log.**



All photos courtesy the 18th Red Deer Venturers

hiking faster than the speed of light. We crossed a boardwalk and hiked along the beach as well. For the most part, it was a fairly light day but the end was difficult. We hiked to the bottom of a steep hill, where we had to climb over piles of huge, fallen trees. There was a beautiful waterfall at this site; very cold water, but what a great view.

Day Three – We had to accomplish 21 kilometres. We all knew it was going to be tough, but we'd make it with each other's support and help. The hike began on the beach, where we stayed as long as possible. One great challenge was to head into the bushes to climb some ladders and cross a few bridges. This was the first day we faced ladders, but we took them on with gusto.

When we realized that we had another 12 km to go from what we thought was near the end of the trail – we found it hard not to get discouraged. The day seemed to drag on and on, and it was incredibly hard, even with the sun shining. The only thing that kept us going was the thought of being able to stop and eat at "Monique's Café" when the day was finished. Our steps began to get slower, and our bones and muscles really ached. We reached the beach again, struggled up some steep hills and always the ladders – several sets. Some of our members had a really tough time since they were so exhausted. Our legs were shaking by the time we got to the café. What a fabulous and welcome meal we had that night.

Day Four – We hit the beach again after thanking Monique and her family for their wonderful hospitality. They told us stories of their lives, and introduced us to their unique heritage. We listened eagerly to their words.

Still pretty sore from the day before, our energy seemed to renew with the sight of a baby bear running on the beach. We watched with awe.

We met a lot of other hikers on this trail. They wished us luck, and told us to stay strong for our next two days of hard hiking. The sand was starting to hurt our ankles and feet, so we headed back to the trail. We took a ferry across the water – everyone was extremely tired and hungry. When the hike started again, we walked through slippery mudholes and boardwalks, and got our clothing and gaiters pretty dirty. The day was finally done after seven kilometres.

Day 5 was the most exhilarating day of our lives. Our feet hurt so bad and our muscles were sore, but we knew we had to keep going no matter what. It started to rain lightly at first, then the wind started blowing. This

On board the Queen of B.C. – the gang's all here!



made it much harder to hike and keep focused. We had to go down two chains – one was a muddy hill and the other was full of sharp rocks. Everything was so slippery and hard to walk on, that we were all pretty scared. There was no other way to go except over huge boulders and little streams of water from the ocean. The rocks were covered in seaweed and slime and they were soaked from the tides. We had to get off the beach and fast. The rain started to get heavier and heavier, soaking our packs and making our clothes wet and heavy.


The group made a human chain on top of the boulders and started to boost the others up. Leaders and youth alike – we all helped each other. We worked as one and got our job done. There was no way we'd make it through the surge channels and the wet rocks alone. People's legs were getting cut by the rocks and everyone was getting bruises. We were still wet and not yet at camp. We finally crossed all the boulders and surge channels and made it to the other side, but now we had to climb up wet, dirty ladders. This was really hard because we were still extremely sore from the boulders. We finally made it to camp, one kilometre later, safe and sound.

Day 6 was our last day on the West Coast Trail. Everyone was so eager to feel the pride and joy of a finished hike! But this was probably the most difficult day. The trail went up and down repeatedly. We had to cross more bridges, climb a lot of ladders, walk on fallen trees and step over many holes, rocks and dirt piles.

Some group members went ahead to catch the ferry to wait for the rest in the group who were having some difficulties. The remaining group stayed fairly close together in their struggle to the end. Kilometre 69 was the longest, hardest, painful kilometre of my life. It was never-ending; I didn't think I'd ever see the end of the day. We just kept moving our feet, one in front of the other, one step at a time. When we reached Kilometre 74, we piled beside the sign with the most humongous smiles on our faces. Our lives had just been altered forever, and we lit up with joy and pride. Feeling nothing but excitement and eternal satisfaction, we ran all the way to the end. We had just finished the journey of a lifetime. X

– The 18th Red Deer Venturers completing the hike were: Jay Carriere, Amy Corpe, Brendan Paquette, Jordan Ludwig, Riley Wilson, Amanda Ramsdale, Shane Fenger, John Watson, Brett Porterfield. Advisors: Mike Corpe, Don Wilson, Doug Fenger, Jeff Ludwig

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