

CHALLENGING THE STEIN RIVER VALLEY TRAVERSE

SECOND PLACE 2008 AMORY ADVENTURE WINNERS

by the 40th Marpole and 28th Kitsilano Venturer Companies

One of the few very remote wilderness treks close to Vancouver is the Stein River Valley Traverse. It is common to hike the first few days and not see another human. The isolation and exposure to the raw elements makes this hike not simply to be taken, but a challenge to be conquered. With its many different climate zones, and rapid weather changes, it would be a challenge indeed. But that is the Venturer Motto, and so we set out on the biggest challenge of our lives. Every single member had the face of a tiger and the heart of a courageous knight.

We prepared for all eventualities by listening to Stein River Valley guides, renewing our First Aid requirements, and weekly visits to the YMCA to improve our cardio and muscles. We had purchased our food and equipment, determined the route and picked up a SPOT – equipment to track our every move, post our location onto a web site for others to see, and call for help if necessary. It was time to face the challenge.

Snow in August!

After a bus ride to Whistler Mountain, we traveled to Blackcomb Helicopters for a helicopter safety talk and ride to the top of Tabletop Mountain. How exciting to ride in a helicopter – it was the ride of our lives. When we landed we were 2013 metres above sea level, and it was cold. The first part of the hike was over snow (in August!) and downhill through boulder fields. We descended to 1802 metres above sea level before finally finding our campsite. It was nothing like we had seen before, with many rocks and no trees. Being in the alpine area, nothing much grows there but small trees and bushes. Exhausted from the long day of travel, we went to bed listening to the raindrops on the tent and Caltha Creek rushing past.

The next day we were on the trail by 8:00. But first we had to cross Caltha Creek – a freezing cold alpine water sprinkled with slippery rocks. Next would come even more difficult hiking, but the views of the glaciers and permasnow, mountains and lakes were stunning. You couldn't really walk, but hopped from boulder to boulder uphill and downhill. These boulders were bigger than a Smart car, and wider too. After lunch we started to cross a steeply slanted mountain. Deciding that we had it too easy, the weather took a dark turn and dumped rain, wind and fog onto us. Loose rocks slipped under our feet as we carefully made our way across the side of the mountain. With the rain not stopping, and fears of hypothermia, we decided to make camp. Unable to use tent pegs

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in the rocky soil, ropes and rocks held down our tent fly. Even then, it took all of our weight in the tent to keep from being blown off the mountain. We ended up eating snacks for supper as nobody was going to light a stove in this storm. Eventually the wind died down and we all fell asleep. Although a bad storm, it taught us that quick movement and not panicking is an important part of survival in the wilderness.

Challenge

By 9:30 the next morning, the rain had stopped and with the high winds, it didn't take long to dry our equipment and clothing from the previous day's storm. Today we crossed more boulder fields and snowpack. We had to stomp into the snow hard to keep from sliding, following in each other footsteps. Just as we thought it couldn't get any more challenging, we came to a lateral moraine slope leading to Tundra Lake. At times we had to lie on our backs and carefully position our feet so that we didn't slip and fall. Tundra Lake was supposed to be our previous day's campsite, so we were at least half a day behind schedule. After lunch we hiked around one side of the lake, following cairns and marking tape. Our hopes faltered when we saw the faint little goat path we were to follow up the steep slope. Eventually we made it to the top and found a small tarn (body of water) for our campsite. The weather had changed for the worst, so we quickly set up camp and snuggled into our tents. Once again, there were only energy bars for supper as we still couldn't light the stoves in the wind and rain. Today we learned that you cannot let one horrible experience get you down – you must get up and continue on. And that's exactly what our company did.

Ridge Climbing

Today was more of boulder jumping, and snow pack climbing, with an added challenge – ridge climbing. It was so steep that we had to climb one at a time, in case a rock rolled from under our feet and struck another hiker. Eventually everyone was at the top and we continued on. The ridge looked like the sharp teeth in a shark's jaws, all rough and rugged. We were leaving the alpine area behind and moving into forests. The group separated into fast hikers and slow hikers. It was hard to see the trail, as many of the orange markers were on trees that had fallen down. We hiked for hours, even into the

dark, and still hadn't reached our campsite. Shortly after 9:00 pm we stopped and set up camp. The other group hadn't caught up to us yet. Although we were worried, we knew they were safe with the other advisor. It had been a difficult day, but an awesome day.

Early the next morning, the other group hiked into our camp. They had only been 30 minutes away, but the darkness had made it impossible to catch up. We resolved to stick together and work as a team from now on. After our first cable car crossing (man-powered!), we found the campsite we should have camped on the previous night. Because we had missed two suppers, we had a feast for lunch. All of our meals were dehydrated food packs – you just add water and wait for a few minutes before eating. We ate until we were stuffed, then ate crackers and honey for dessert. It was delicious. Too soon, we struggled to put our packs on and continued down the trail to Avalanche Creek. Arriving by suppertime, we were happy to be on schedule again. A blazing fire helped to dry everyone's boots and clothes, and with full stomachs we went to sleep.



Persistence

Persistence paid off as we continued day after day through the mountainous landscape. Our muscles toughened, our senses sharpened; we were beating it! One day we missed our campsite and didn't even realize it until we arrived at the next day's site. On the last day, we agreed to push on through the extra kilometers so we could have a "chill" day in the town of Lytton. Everyone was very excited to be in a town, out of the wilderness. It felt good to have hot showers and relax.

The next day was HYAK river rafting on the Thompson River. With rapids named the Witches Cauldron and the Jaws of Death, it was extremely exciting. We even jumped out of the raft in one section and swam in the rapids. What a day. There is nothing like rafting at the end of a hike.

Soon it was morning; we packed up and caught a bus back to Vancouver. As we sat waiting for our transportation, we were eager to get home to our parents, friends and nice soft beds. It had been a challenge, but we had all learned a lot about survival and ourselves. An adventure trip of a lifetime. X

— the 40th Marpole and 28th Kitsilano Venturer Companies
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