

KAKWA PROVINCIAL PARK

September 4-8, 2010

Darren Bell had been planning and researching this trip for several months, and the time had finally arrived. The B.C. forest fire situation had been extinguished thanks to cold temperatures and rain. The forecast was rather pessimistic too, but there were enough little sunny icons on the weather page for us to be hopeful of a couple good days in the Kakwa.

For access, park information, and trail descriptions, see John Vogt's superb [Kakwa website](#). Richard Giroday's [internet essay](#) is a good resource, as is mvjanzen's recent [trip report](#). If you're like me, you've seen nothing but sunny pictures from the park... until now.

Saturday, September 4:

The Walker Forestry Service Road was in excellent condition despite heavy rains on the drive in, and we arrived to find a busy trailhead. It was clearly occupied by ATV users, not hikers. We porcupine-proofed our vehicles and generally hunkered down for the evening, trying to stay dry. Our original plan was to overnight at the Kakwa cabin before proceeding to the Jarvis Lake cabin, but I'd been warned that the porcupines had done a number on the cabin over the winter and we'd be wise to bring tents just in case. Given the worsening weather Saturday night, we made the decision to only go to the Kakwa cabin and do day hikes from there. This would allow us to pack lighter and hopefully maximize our time in the park.

Sunday, September 5:

To say it was cold, wet, and windy is an understatement. We couldn't see any of the surrounding mountains, let alone the peaks. But off we went. The washouts start early but were easy to negotiate. The lower trail (the recommended mountain bike trail, which veers to the left once across Bastille Creek) was pretty solid overall, although we had to dismount several times to walk through some horrendously muddy sections. Only one washout came to my hips but it wasn't difficult.

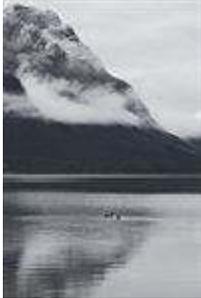
We made it to Buchanan Creek in 1.5 hours. The crossing was just above knee height for myself. And then the trail went up. There wasn't much point pedaling a lot of it, since we could walk nearly as fast with much less effort. Blueberries were ripe and we encountered bear scat frequently (later, the park host would tell us that they ran into a big silver tip grizzly at McGregor Pass). Once we finished the long haul up to McGregor Pass, the rain stopped. It was a relatively flat ride past Wishaw and Mariel Lakes until the turnoff to the cabins, where we had the opportunity to end our day with a fast ride downhill. Darren was having problems with his rear brakes, so I don't think he enjoyed it as much as I did. In total, with lunch and breaks, the trip in was 8 hours.

At the lake, we were greeted by park host Sam and his mother. They kindly offered us tea and cookies and helped us get settled in. The cabin was clean and cozy and we slept well.

I didn't take any pictures from the biking portion (SLR stashed in my pack, underneath a very necessary raincover). I think Darren has some good ones.

Monday, September 6:

We awoke to poor visibility and snow on the surrounding peaks. I got a few morning photos as we discussed our options for the day. Anything with elevation was out. We still had time on our side. So we decided to hunker down and make the best of the day in the comfortable lakeside cabin. Sam and his mom left first thing in the morning so we had the whole place to ourselves. The sun peaked out a couple times during the mid-afternoon but the clouds never lifted off the mountains. Even the lowly Mt. Ruth was obscured for the whole day.



Tuesday, September 7:

The morning looked clear. The barometer on my watch still indicated the pressure was through the basement and the wind was blowing, but we got an early start to La Glace Lake. It would be approximately a 16 km round trip to the ridge east of the lake. The clouds hung low over Wishaw Mountain, probably due to the glacier further cooling the air around it, and we kept our fingers crossed.



The trail towards the La Glace turn-off was well marked. There were no human footprints but recent deer, elk, moose, wolf, grizzly sow and cub(s) were evident. At the edge of one particular meadow, there is a memorial to Carl Brooks, a big game outfitter and pilot who died in a plane crash in 1945. There were pieces of the airplane which people have found over the years and piled against the memorial. It was very interesting.



Once we reached La Glace creek, we stayed on the east side and bushwacked up to the basin. Route-finding was relatively easy. We walked past a beautiful waterfall here:



Once at La Glace Lake, I decided to scramble a gully up the ridge to the east for a better perspective. It got very sketchy at the top, with loose scree on unstable terrain. I couldn't make my way up through the vegetation because with the steep grade and rain it was incredibly slick. I was glad to get up and down in one piece. Great views from the top were worthwhile, even though the low clouds obscured the Wishaw Glacier. This ridge has a great vantage point of the entire area.



On the return, we crossed La Glace Creek at its outflow from the lake, and followed a game trail across the forested ridge parallel to the lake before descending to the large open meadow which you can see in the picture above. We spotted an orange marker at the north side of the meadow which led us to a good trail on the west side of the creek, which we followed all the way out.



Amazingly, the sun came out for our walk across the meadows to Kakwa Lake. Looking back to Wishaw Peak, however, we could see the low clouds continued to hang persistently. Views across to Ian Monroe and St. Andrew were beautiful.



Wednesday, September 8:

We had identified Corniche Pass and Babette Lake vicinity as our objective for Wednesday. However, the weather seemed to have it in for us. It was the coldest morning so far with a lot of wind, and the clouds were heavy and low. We waited until 10 am to see if we could hallucinate some sort of clearing pattern, but nothing was changing. Instead of spending another day cooped up in the cabin, we elected to head home. On the south side of McGregor Pass, we encountered a few sunny breaks, but it was obvious as we looked back over our shoulders that the Kakwa valley was still mired in a brew of low clouds.



The ride down was awesome. It took 3.5 hours to get from the cabin to our vehicles as the kilometers ticked by with no effort. The tote road is lined with blueberries and tall thick willows at times, so we made sure to make a lot of noise as we whipped around blind corners. Our only disappointment was encountering ATV tracks up towards the pass. Motorized vehicles (except snowmobiles) are NOT allowed past Buchanan Creek. This is clearly indicated by a sign south of Buchanan Creek.

Sometimes you're lucky with the weather and other times you draw the short straw. Regardless, it was a worthwhile trip to a beautiful destination. A great sense of wilderness and solitude awaits those who make the effort to travel to the Kakwa.