

Elkhorn Mountain



Elkhorn Mountain north-east aspect from Mt. Flannigan, April.

Elkhorn Mountain

7,119 ft. / 2,195 m

Elkhorn is the second highest peak on Vancouver Island and pretender to the Golden Hinde's crown. It is one of the Island's most aesthetic summits, with a classic Matterhorn shape. Elkhorn can be climbed as a long day trip by fit parties although the mountain is worthy of a longer stay to savour its climbing options and stunning relief. Elkhorn has a reputation for loose rock which is unfounded. There is undeniably some loose gravel on the easier routes and a field of blocky boulders near the summit but the steeper ground is solid and provides some of the island's best alpine climbing on very high quality rock. The climbing potential on Elkhorn is vast, particularly on the south-west and east faces with plenty of scope for some sporty rock and ice routes.

First Ascent: A.O. Wheeler, Oliver Wheeler, Albert MacCarthy, D.A. Gillies, A.R. Hart, J.R. Robertson, H.O. Frind, L.C. Wilson and F.A. Robertson 1912

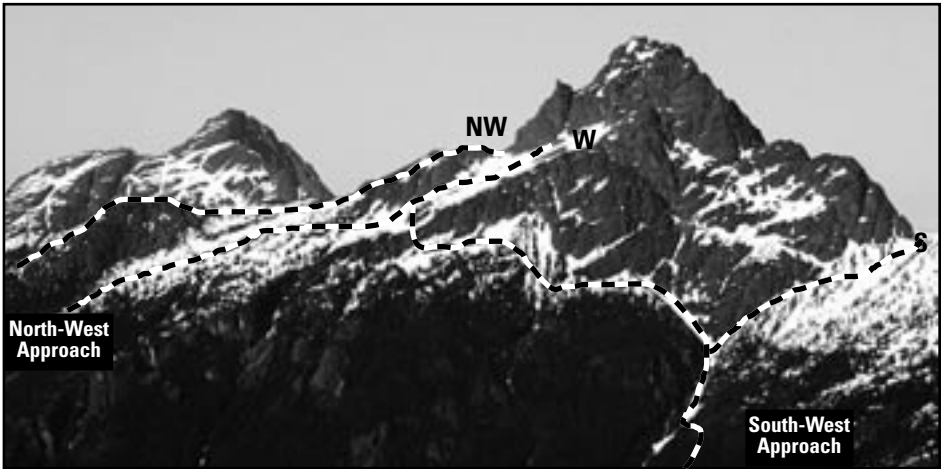
First Winter Ascent: P. Busch, A. Watts February 1968

Map Sheet: 92 F/13 Upper Campbell Lake - GR 9618

Approaches: Several well established approaches lead to the various sides of Elkhorn.

North-West approach - The most common approach to routes on the north and west sides of the mountain is via the Elk River Trail (ERT). From the trailhead on Highway 28 hike south up the ERT. At a point 2 km up, the ERT runs briefly alongside a wide gravel bar in the Elk River (not to be confused with the Gravel Bar camp which is much further up the valley). Across the Elk River, on the east side, the steep canyon of Elkhorn Creek can be seen rising up. Make sure you see an obvious steep sided valley on the other side of the river before crossing the river. Cross the Elk River by ford or logjam and pick up a well worn and recently re-flagged route that leads high above the right (south) side of Elkhorn Creek into a hanging valley of huge hemlocks. The route takes a steep gully right of the waterfall to a forested col on the north-west ridge. There is a view, water and a campsite 200m to the right (north) of this col on a little rocky knoll.

From the col head south-east along the ridge, eventually breaking out above the treeline. A number of options are possible from here. Either stay on the crest of the ridge as much as possible with several steep scrambling sections, to reach the base of the North-West Ridge. Alternatively make a wide traverse rightward (south) and traverse into the bottom of the West Basin and hike up on snow or scree to the base of the North-West Ridge or West Couloir.



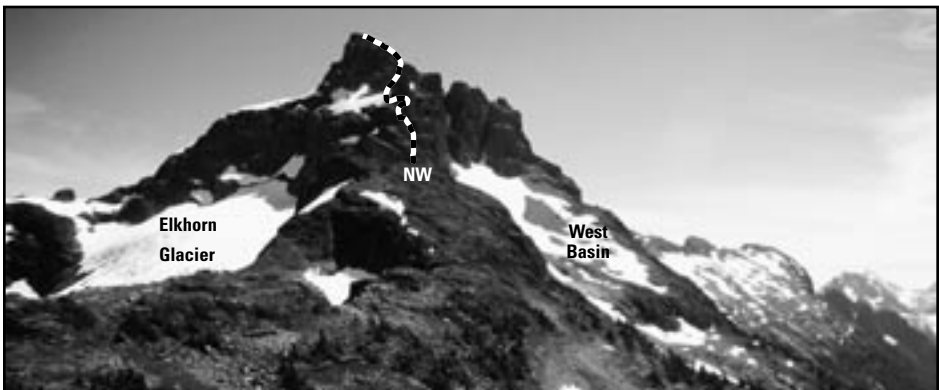
King's Peak (L) & Elkhorn Mountain (R) south-west aspect from Mt. Colonel Foster south col, July.

To reach the North Face and North Ridge routes simply descend on the north side of the North-West Ridge down a steep snow/scree gully to the Elkhorn Glacier.

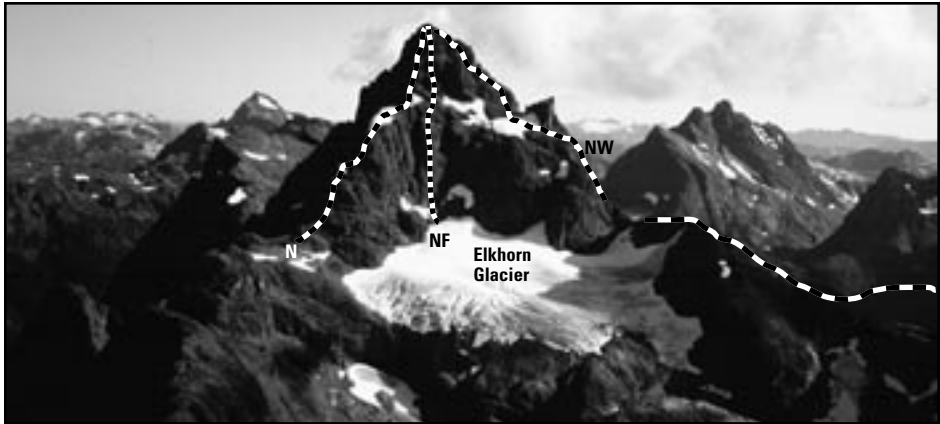
South-West approach - A direct approach to reach routes on the south and east sides of Elkhorn leads up from the Gravel Bar camp 10 km up the ERT. Cross the Elk River just south of the campsite and locate a flagged route following the right (south) side of a steep creek. Near treeline the route trends left into the boulder strewn creek bed. Head up the creek to a fork below the south-west face of the mountain.

For routes on the west and north sides, make a long traverse left (north) up a scree/snow slope. Keep close to the bottom of a cliff band to reach the West Basin. To reach the South Ridge and routes on the East Face head up the right fork direct to the base of the South Ridge. This route is much more pleasant in spring snow cover than later when the boulders become exposed in the creek bed. The north-west and south-west approaches can be combined to climb Elkhorn en route either up or down the Elk River Trail.

from King's Peak - Elkhorn can also be approached from King's Peak by two main routes. The easier hiking route drops down the south-west side of King's Peak into the wide basin on Elkhorn's north-west side climbing back up on to the Elkhorn Glacier and joining the North-West Ridge at the toe of the upper ridge. A more difficult traverse may be made along the rocky ridge linking the South Ridge of King's Peak's with Elkhorn's North Ridge. 4th class and low 5th class scrambling with a couple of possible rappells. Conditions will vary with seasonal snow cover. See King's -Elkhorn Arete on page 215.



Elkhorn Mountain from north-west approach, August.



Elkhorn Mountain north aspect from King's Peak, September.

Routes

N- *** **North Ridge:** 5.8 400m (III)

A classic arete. Reach by traversing the Elkhorn Glacier from the north-west approach or from King's Peak along the King's-Elkhorn Arete to a shoulder at the base of the prominent North Ridge. Start up 3rd class ground for 250m to below steeper rock.

Climb a steep face to a groove. Follow the groove to a large detached flake. Stem up a corner and over loose rock to a crack system. Follow the righthand crack and bypass a roof on the right to reach the base of a chimney. Climb the chimney to a boulder choke then head right around an arete to a short face and another chimney to easier ground near the top.

FA: Joe Bajan, Tom Muirhead, Dave Smith, Stuart Wazny 1972

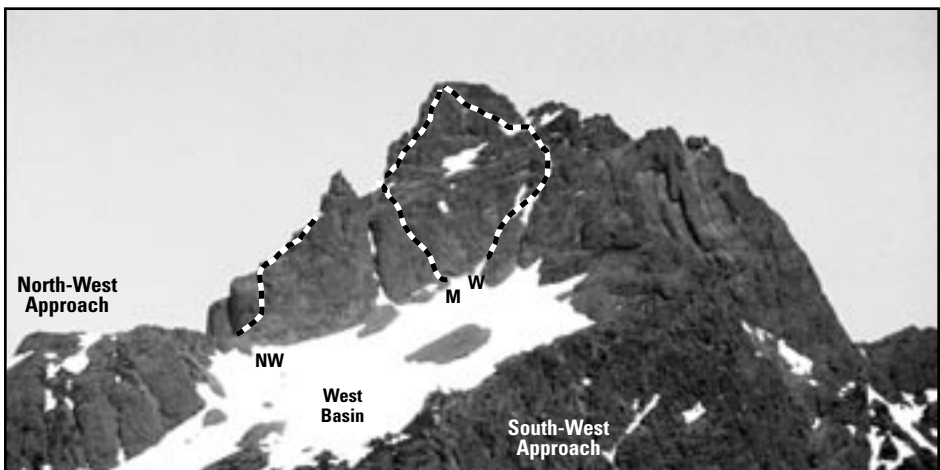
NF- ** **North Face:** ~5.8 300m (III/IV)

A serious but excellent route. Approach on the north-west approach. From the toe of the upper North-West Ridge descend left (north) down a gully to the Elkhorn Glacier. Cross the glacier to below the middle of the North Face. Start to the left of the centre of the face up a rib between two parallel gullies. Steep climbing leads to the snowpatch. Climb direct up the snow/ice to finish up several steep rock pitches to the summit. (CAJ 1979 p.73)

FA: Joe Bajan, Peter Busch 18 June 1977

M- ** **Mitrenga Variation:** low 5th Class 100m

An alternative start to the North-West Ridge from the West Basin joining the ridge above the gendarme though an entertaining chimney.



Elkhorn Mountain west aspect from Volcano Lake, June.



Elkhorn Mountain south aspect from Mt Colwell, August.

NW- * North-West Ridge:** low 5th class 400m (II)

The original route on the mountain and a classic. Start on the crest of the ridge approached from the West Basin by either the north or south-west approaches. Scramble up 4th class ledges and low 5th class rock steps below gendarme. Bypass the gendarme on the left (north) side on the Upper glacier then regain the crest over 5th class steps to reach a right trending ledge on the west side which is followed to a boulder field toward the top. The gendarme may also be bypassed on the right (south) side. Great exposure and care with route finding required. Descend same route or West Couloir.

FA: A.O. Wheeler et al 1912

W- ** West Couloir: low 5th Class 250m (II)

The standard and easiest route up Elkhorn and main descent from other routes. Approach the West Basin by either north-west or south-west routes to the top centre of the West Basin. Enter the bottom of a wide gully capped with a huge chockstone. Take a tiny ramp on the right side of the gully in to a little cave and chimney up, above the chockstone.

Continue scrambling direct up the gully system with short steep low 5th class rock steps and snow/screed sections. Head left to a boulder field and clamber up this to the summit. Take care to note the route on the way up for the descent.

FA: Unknown

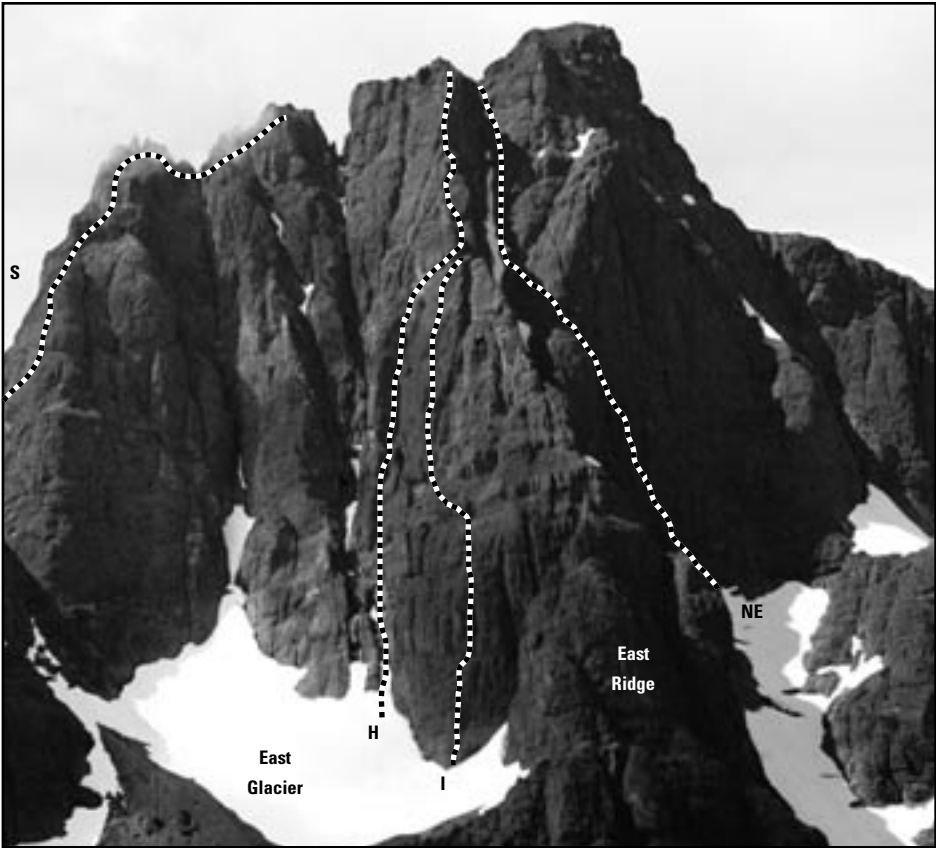
S- ** South Ridge: low 5th class 600m (III)

Infrequently climbed but a very aesthetic feature of Elkhorn with great climbing and atmosphere. The South Ridge is key to access and descent for many of the possible routes on the East Face. Approach the south-west route from the gravel flats on the ERT or traverse below the west face from the north-west approach to the crux of a Y-shaped gully below the south-west face. Hike directly up the right (south) branch of the Y to a col at toe of the South Ridge between Elkhorn & Mt Colwell. (see page 225). Start directly on the ridge crest with easy ground to start. Follow steepening gullies and chimneys remaining on the crest to South Summit.

FA: Joe Bajan, Ron Facer 1971



King's Peak - Elkhorn Mountain Areté west aspect from north-west approach, August.



Elkhorn Mountain east aspect from Mt. Cobb, August.

I ** Into The Sadistic: 5.10b 500m (III)

A sporty route on an impressive alpine wall. Approach as for the South Ridge from the Elk River gravel flats campsite. From the narrow col between Elkhorn & Mt. Colwell, at foot of the South Ridge, traverse on a narrow, exposed ledge to the pocket East Glacier. Start up well protected, parallel cracks (5.10b) on a prominent buttress just left (south) of the East Ridge which bounds the far right side of the glacial cirque. Continue direct up an incredible black chimney/dyke (5.9) with wild exposure and excellent protection.

Make an easy 3rd Class traverse left to some run-out face climbing on friable rock. A series of steep aretes and corners follow leading on to the East Ridge right at the notch that has so far barred completion of the East Ridge. Descend gully on climber's left (Harrison Route) with 5 raps back to glacier.

FA: Philip Stone, Greg Shea, 18 September. 1993

H ** Harrison Route: 5.5 600m (III)

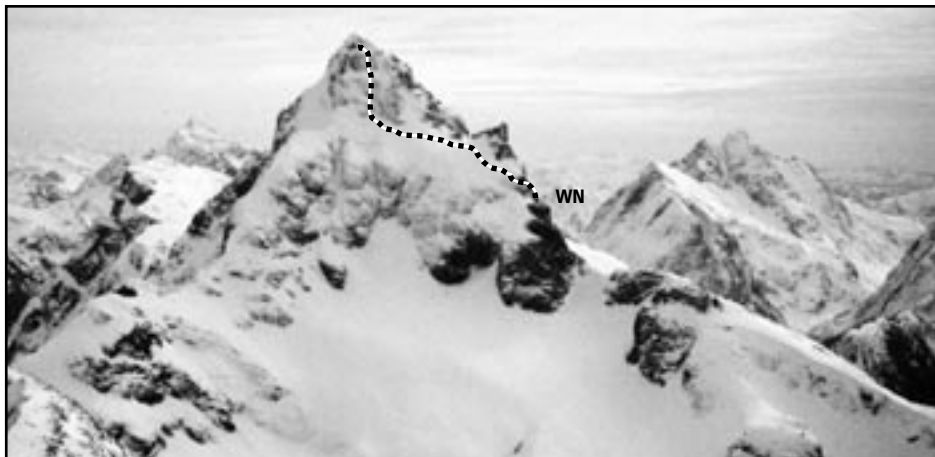
A bold and infrequently repeated route. Originally approached from Cervus Creek up a 3rd class rib adjacent to lower east face. From east glacier climb the righthand side of a gully system to the crest of east ridge. Exposed low 5th class scrambling on superb rock leads to the south summit.

FA: Alan Harrison, June 1975

NE ** North-East Face: 5.7 400m (III)

An atmospheric line originally soloed. Approach up Cervus Creek to an obvious kink in the line of the creek below the North-East Face of Elkhorn. Hike up a wide open creek bed below the face. Take care with avalanche hazard with any amount of snow cover in this gully. From an upper basin below the face head left up snowfields to the base of a long J shaped gully. Start up slabs to the right of the base of the gully. Keep right eventually joining an arete. Join the gully to your left near the top. Descend West Couloir to the ERT.

FA: Tim Rippel, June 1985



Elkhorn Mountain north aspect from King's Peak, January.

Winter Routes

W ** West Couloir: AI2 250m (III)

Climbs the obvious wide gully system just to climber's right of the North-West Ridge. A huge chockstone caps the gully and must be avoided on the righthand side by squeezing through a tight ice filled chimney. Depending on current conditions this chimney may be clogged with snow. Above continue up the gully system with several short steep pitches and easier climbing in between. Large belay stances with rock anchors make this an enjoyable winter route.

FA: Peter Busch, A. Watts February 1968

WN * Winter Needle: 5.7 AI4 200m (III)

Follow the North-West Ridge to just past the gendarme. Make a wide traverse across the Upper glacier to reach the bottom of a gully through the upper rock pyramid. Climb this gully on steep ice and snow to the summit.

FA: Randy Pearce, Rod Walker February 1996

Additional Info: IB 1996 p.10, WIM #5 p.12, WIM #21 p.9



Elkhorn Mountain north-east aspect from Mt. Flannigan, March.