



BC Parks' Rangers Andy Smith (L) and Ron Quilter (R) unfurl the BC Parks 100 banner on the summit of Crown Mountain to declare the one hundredth anniversary of Strathcona and BC's Provincial Parks.

Introduction

Standing at the summit of Crown Mountain on July 29th, 2010 was an emotional moment for the members of the Strathcona Centennial Expedition. It was the culmination of a solid year of planning and preparation, two decades of dreaming and scheming, and for some, a high point in a career dedicated to service in British Columbia's first and oldest Provincial Park - Strathcona.

Among the two dozen people, of all ages and walks of life, who joined the different legs of the expedition the reasons for participating were varied. The one common thread was a sense of participating in a true adventure. And adventurous it was indeed.

Over eighteen days the Strathcona Centennial Expedition followed the route of Price Ellison's 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition, approximately three hundred kilometres from Campbell River to Port Alberni through the mountainous interior of Vancouver Island.



Left: Paddling up to the beach for the portage over the Strathcona Dam.

Right: Golden light at evening lights up a cluster of mountain hemlocks high on an alpine ridge near Crown Mountain.



The team travelled by canoe across wide lakes, hiked through dense bush onto high alpine ridges and summited Crown Mountain one hundred years to the day from Ellison and his 1910 party.

Wonderful as the experience of the 2010 expedition was, it also served as a reminder of the endeavours of the 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition and the legacy Price Ellison's foresight left for British Columbia.

Ellison's dogged determination to undertake the original expedition, climb Crown Mountain and return to Victoria, was pivotal in establishing Strathcona as the first of British Columbia's Provincial Parks. Ellison's glowing account to cabinet led to the passing of the Strathcona Act in March 1911 thereby beginning a park system of which the whole of British Columbia and Canada should be proud.

To the dedicated group that organized the centennial expedition there seemed to be no better way to pay homage to Strathcona on the park's

one hundredth birthday than to re-enact Ellison's original journey.

As the plans for the expedition began to take shape, it became clear that the scope of this adventure could, and should, reach well beyond just undertaking the trip itself. To help build the venture to reach its potential the Centennial Expedition set out a number of goals.

- To re-enact as marked by Proclamation of British Columbia's Lieutenant Governor, the 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition, retracing Price Ellison's footsteps through British Columbia's first Provincial Park in July-August 2010 thereby launching celebrations for BC Parks' 100th anniversary in 2011
- To raise awareness of the amazing natural, historical and recreational opportunities of Strathcona Park to British Columbia residents, media and visitors.
- To establish a legacy fund on behalf of Strathcona Park for enhancing stewardship, building and maintaining infrastructure, land acquisition and environmental rehabilitation.

By the time the centennial expedition party arrived in Victoria on August 8th, 2010 it was clear that each of these objectives had been achieved or were well on their way to completion. There is no doubt that Strathcona Centennial Expedition has been, and continues to be, a resounding success.

In all twenty four people joined the expedition on different legs. The trip was broken down into four distinct sections: Campbell Lakes, Crown Mountain, Buttle Lake and Price Creek to Great Central Lake. Participant scheduling, food preparation and transportation logistics were then all organized to meet the requirements of each of these legs.

The result was a smooth, safe journey with three opportunities for the public-at-large to join in the adventure and celebrations. In Campbell River on departure day fifty people gathered at the Tye Spit to see the expedition off and a dozen or more day hikers walked with the group to the canoes at McIvor Lake. After returning down from Crown Mountain BC Parks held a well-attended public event at Buttle Narrows, on BC Day, to commemorate the 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition and acknowledge the centennial expedition. And in Port Alberni the expedition was welcomed ashore at Great Central Lake by well wishers as the journey drew to an end.

The story of the Strathcona Centennial Expedition, of-course, begins in 1910 with the Strathcona Discovery Expedition which first explored the park. What followed was a century that at best could be described as checkered as successive provincial



Left: The iconic Strathcona Park view of Nine Peaks across Cream Lake. In 1987 a mining company proposed draining the lake and building a mine here.

Right: Hikers above Cream Lake with Mt. Septimus behind.

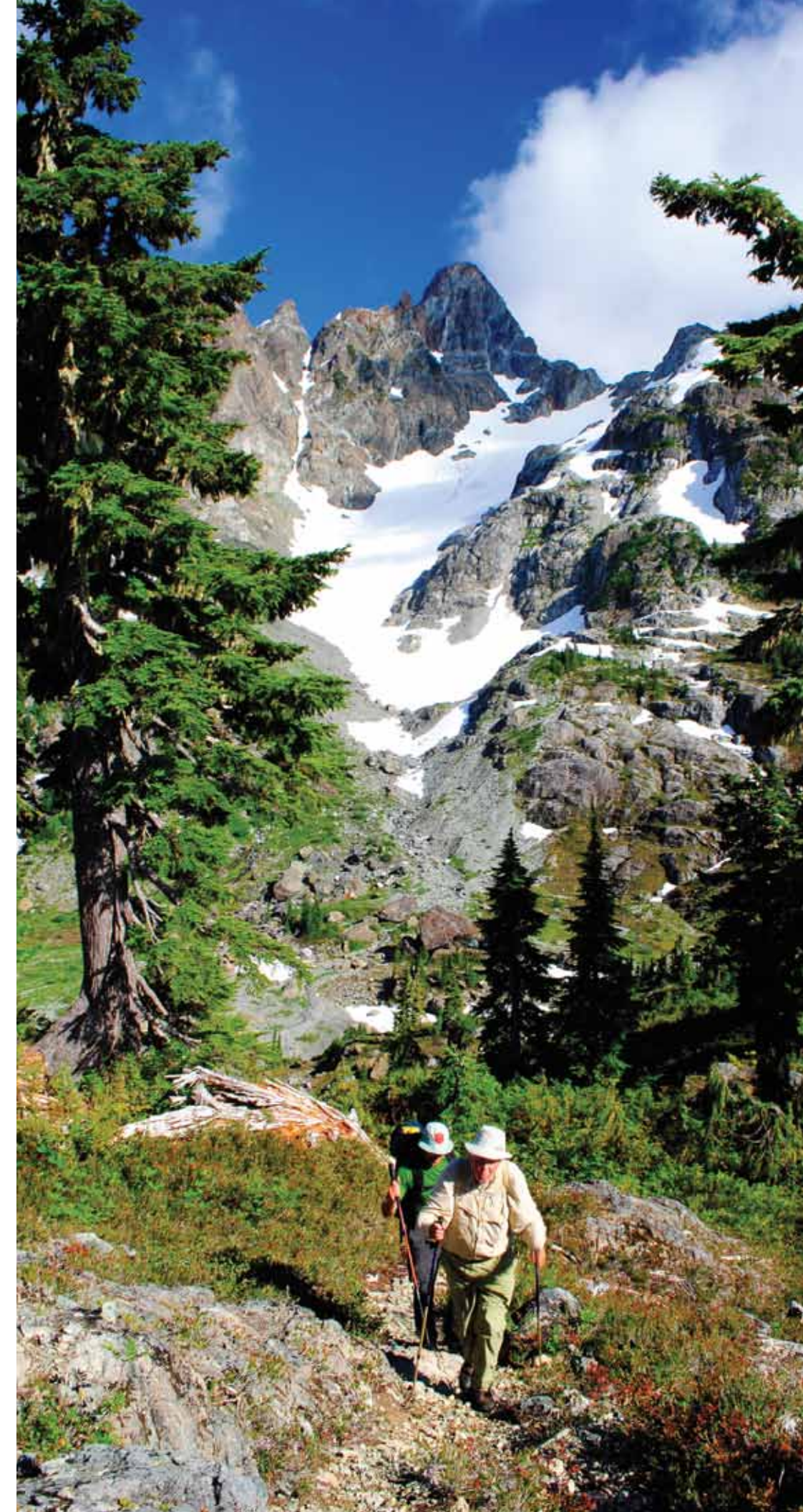
of its history and of the 1910 Discovery Expedition.

Ron and I first spoke seriously about re-enacting the Ellison Expedition in the centennial year at some point in 2006. We went so far as to contact the Province newspaper who had a connection to early Vancouver Island exploration. The Province had sponsored two of Rev. William Bolton's expeditions traversing the length of Vancouver Island in the 1890's. Bolton accompanied Ellison on much of the 1910 expedition as well.

In March 2007 an article appeared in the Province featuring some of the history of Bolton, Ellison and mentioned plans for a re-enactment. This garnered more media attention including a CBC Radio story. The resulting public interest gave a good indication to Ron and I that the idea was being well received and that, when the time was right, planning should begin.

Somewhere along the line I was invited to apply to become part of the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee. As I began to work with the committee and with Ron in his official capacity it became clear that the project to re-enact the 1910 expedition was a perfect fit for S.P.P.A.C. to take on.

Initially, as so many backcountry trips start, the idea was pretty simple. A group of people would follow the same route as the 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition. The original trip was well-documented. Price Ellison's nephew Harry McClure Johnson had written a 200-plus page journal, which along with the expedition photographer Frank Ward's pictures provided a wealth of information as to how, when and where they had travelled.



governments eroded the original majesty of Strathcona by issuing timber and mining permits and perhaps most damaging of all, allowing the flooding of the Campbell River all the way back to Buttle Lake for hydro-electricity. Park lands in Strathcona were traded-off to acquire other parks which inevitably led to more logging in and around Strathcona.

But while all this exploitation was occurring, Strathcona's core remained mostly intact. Steadily as the decades rolled by more and more people came to know the park and it worked its magic endearing it to their hearts.

When in 1988 a mining company were granted permits to begin exploratory drilling in the Price Creek area, matters came to a head. After a public outcry and the first arrests in Canada for people

defending a park the BC government began, at least for the moment, to listen, and drilling stopped. A commission was struck resulting in the Larkin Report which recommended a Master Plan be developed for the park and a public committee formed to oversee its implementation and advise the government on park matters. That committee became the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee.

Given the history, nature and interests of members on the committee it was only natural that the idea for celebrating Strathcona's centennial would become a topic of S.P.P.A.C.'s discussions. But how that came about starts a little earlier...

BC Parks Section Head Ron Quilter had first come to Strathcona Park as a fresh-faced ranger in 1978. Having spent most of his career in the park he was well aware



Photo: Grant Warkentin

Left: Robert Behrendt (R) and Dave Keiver (L) present Ron Quilter (2nd L) and Philip Stone (2nd R) with cheque for \$20,000 to sponsor the Strathcona Centennial Expedition.

Below: The proclamation marking SCE 2010 as the official re-enactment of the 1910 Strathcona Discovery Expedition.

Right: Robert Behrendt V.P. NVI Mining Ltd. (L) and Bob Carreau V.P. Breakwater Resources (R) on the summit of Crown Mountain.

Below: Jamie Boulding from Strathcona Park Lodge skipping the expedition across Upper Campbell Lake.



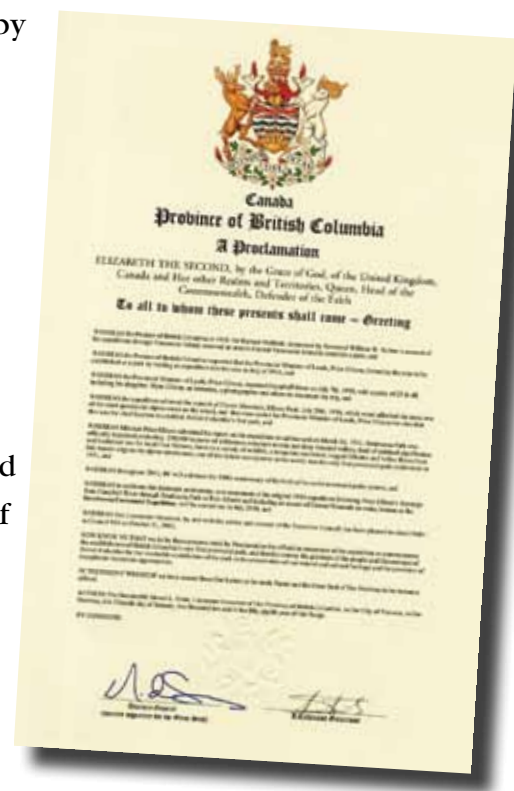
The more the expedition was discussed the more ideas came forward. This wasn't just a chance to retrace an old canoe and hiking trip. It would be an opportunity to re-enact and relive history, engage people across Vancouver Island and BC and be the first major event in celebrations for BC Parks' 100 which would be year-long in 2011.

The Strathcona Centennial Expedition became an initiative of the Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee, working in partnership with BC Parks. An organizing committee was formed in mid-2009 comprised of Tawney Lem, Barb Baker and myself from S.P.P.A.C. with Ron Quilter, Angus Carnie and Jim Gilliland from BC Parks.

One of the first steps was to establish some measure of official status to the project. As the 1910 expedition had been a government initiative it seemed appropriate that the 2010 version would have some sort of similar status. Not only would that bring authenticity to the re-enactment but also, we hoped

help with attracting participants and sponsors. So a letter was drafted to Premier Gordon Campbell advising him of our plans, relating a little of the history and requesting the government's support. The Premier's office duly responded and a proclamation was issued, signed by British Columbia's Lt. Governor, The Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC, Xw? l? qw?l t?l and the Attorney General.

Together through a series of meetings, conference calls and a cyber-mountain of emails S.C.E. 2010 took shape. With Angus' guidance we began the



process of raising money and developing sponsorship partnerships. An extensive web site was created for broader communication and also served to crystallize the plan and gaps that needed solutions.

The list of participants began to grow as word spread. Some people interested had come forward as early as 2007, including Murray Sovereign a great-grandson of Price Ellison and grand-nephew of Myra King Ellison. Relatives of other original expedition members also got in contact, mostly just for a nice long chat and encouragement. These connections all became part of the wonderful process of reviving a century-old story.

As 2010 rolled around the Centennial Expedition committee were working feverishly. Frequent media releases were keeping the public informed. The good-news nature of the story almost guaranteed media exposure each time we had something to tell or request.

Essential assistance with transportation logistics and providing canoes at the Campbell River end

was generously offered by Strathcona Park Lodge. Realizing how ideally situated and set-up the lodge was to support the expedition we also contracted them to prepare all the food, which turned out to be a masterstroke, because it was all delicious! By May 2010, just two months from departure, the project was still missing an anchor sponsor. That was until another series of synchronous events and connections came into play and NVI Mining Ltd. came onboard as our 'Crown' sponsor.





Tawney Lem chatting with Bob Carreau around camp on the Strathcona Centennial Expedition's descent from Crown Mountain

Although it may have raised a few eyebrows that the much-maligned mine in Strathcona would help finance the seminal centennial celebration there are many reasons why this proved to be an excellent partnership. On the surface, sponsoring the Strathcona Centennial Expedition could be seen as an opportunity for NVI to 'give something back' to the park. But the benefits, in both directions, went much further than financial support alone.

As part of the deal S.C.E. invited top-level sponsors to participate in the actual expedition itself. Rising to the occasion were Robert Behrendt, VP & General Manager of NVI and Bob Carreau VP with Breakwater Resources, NVI's parent company who both took part in the Crown Mountain ascent. Robert was so-taken with the experience he stayed on for the next leg down Buttle Lake too.

Outside of the expedition, NVI meet and work regularly with BC Parks, and at times S.P.P.A.C. to discuss a wide range of matters. As such there is a

three-way working relationship. It is fair to say that the trip was an invaluable team-building experience for members of all three organizations, to work together, and amongst themselves, in an environment such as the Centennial Expedition afforded. Strathcona Park will certainly benefit from these enhanced relationships and a shared awareness of what makes the park so cherished.

In all, the Strathcona Centennial Expedition raised close to \$30,000. An amount well beyond what was required to outfit even such a large group for a canoeing and hiking trip.

With that in mind the organizers began to expand the scope and add-ons around the expedition. We secured the services of a small, talented film crew, videographer Aaron Black, sound technician and editor Chris Kruger assisted by young Seamus Mooney. Producing a documentary video about the expedition would prove to be indispensable in relating the story of Strathcona and the Centennial Expedition far and wide.

Film maker Aaron Black recording a spectacular sunset from the 'Great Divide'.

To extend the value and momentum built up by the expedition it was decided to use any surplus funds to establish a fund for the park - the Strathcona Centennial Legacy Fund. Monies donated to the fund might be used for a variety of initiatives within Strathcona and ensure that the awareness and money raised by BC Parks 100 was maximized.

By mid-June 2010 it seemed that most of the organization was finalized. There were a few loose ends such as finding canoes for the journey down Great Central Lake. Barb Baker's persistence and the generosity of the Hupacasath First Nation saved the day and the expedition was furnished with as fine craft as we could have hoped for.

All the municipal and regional governments in communities bordering Strathcona and First Nations were contacted and invited to participate in various capacities. Three main public events were planned: on departure day in Campbell River, mid-way at Buttle Narrows and in Port Alberni at the end of the backcountry portion of the expedition.

Each of these events turned out to be well-attended and successful. All wonderful opportunities to celebrate shared passions for Strathcona Park.

And so, with all these varied pieces falling into place, sponsors secured, participants scheduled and well-informed about when to be where, transportation planned out, food menus set, events organized, communities engaged and a media communication plan setup the Strathcona Centennial Expedition was ready to get underway.





(L-R) Philip Stone, Kate Balzer and Tawney Lem dip their feet in the ocean at Campbell River before leaving to trek across Vancouver Island to Port Alberni on the Island's west coast.

The expedition route would go from Campbell River, halfway up Vancouver Island's east coast, westward following the course of the now-dammed Campbell River, across the Campbell lakes to the boundary of Strathcona Park. Once at Strathcona's doorstep there would be a crew change and resupply, and the team would head overland to climb Crown Mountain. This is often seen as the seminal point of Ellison's original 1910 expedition. It was the only mountain summit climbed and it just happens to have superlative views of the high peaks in the heart of Strathcona.

From Crown Mountain the line of travel returns to the lakes, first crossing Upper Campbell Lake to Strathcona Park Lodge to resupply and welcome fresh troops, and then south to Buttle Narrows for an official ceremony commemorating the 1910 expedition and then on down Buttle Lake to the mouth of Price Creek.

At Price Creek would be a final resupply and crew change before heading back into the mountains. The group would follow the Price Creek trail to Price Pass on Vancouver Island's 'Great Divide', between east and west coast watersheds. Then down Margaret Creek to the renowned Della Falls trail and waiting canoes on Great Central Lake. Paddling down Great Central Lake would bring the expedition to Port Alberni and the end of the self-propelled journey.

But the expedition wouldn't be over until we'd taken the train from Qualicum Beach to Victoria and capped it all off with breakfast at the Empress, just as Ellison and his 'inner circle' had one hundred years before.

Following the lead of Harry McClure Johnson and Frank Ward, whose journal and photographs of 1910 played such a key role in inspiring the Centennial Expedition, here is the daily journal and pictures from the 2010 Strathcona Centennial Expedition.

