

October 2007 – Wilderness Committee Ghost Pass Trail Report

The Ghost Pass trail is located in a glacial hanging valley. The upper 7/8 of the valley is relatively flat valley bottom, and the lower 1/8 plunges down steep cliffs 300 metres to the Sumallo River. The lower 100 metres of the valley is within Manning Park. The majority of the valley is located 3km west of the western border of Manning Park. This geographic anomaly of the valley being both in and out of Manning Park is due to the presence of a “panhandle” section of the park boundary that parallels highway #3. This means that a considerable portion of western Manning Park is comprised of a narrow swath of valley bottom forests within the Sumallo River Valley, while adjacent tributary valleys, such as 18 Mile Creek, are left out of the park.

The fact that so many tributaries of the Sumallo River and Skagit River are outside Manning Park is unfortunate, but typical of BC park geography. Low elevation, wildlife rich areas are frequently left outside parks while higher elevation mountainsides are included. The 25km stretch between Hope and the West Gate area of Manning Park is such an area, and is referred to by scientists as the “Coast/Cascade Connector.” This area is a critically important wildlife corridor and forest habitat link between the United States and Canada, and is the only remaining lower elevation forested link between the 2 countries, west of the Cascades. Some of the area is protected, such as the Skagit River Valley.

The Ghost Pass trail is within 18 Mile Creek Valley, a tributary of the Sumallo River, which in turn flows into the Skagit River. 18 Mile Creek Valley is located between the Mt Outram Trail and 20 Mile Creek. Trail access is from the Manning Park West Gate parking lot and is well signed by BC Parks. The total trail length from the West Gate parking lot to Ghost Lake is 15km.

The portion of 18 Mile Creek valley outside the park is classified by the BC Forest Service (BCFS) as open to logging, though to date it has never been logged. Logging road right of way flagging was found in 18 Mile Creek. This road right of way flagging connects to the road right of way flagging from 20 Mile Creek. An Interfor contractor who signed the flagging tape admitted in a phone conversation to having been directed by Interfor to continue the 20 Mile Creek road right of way flagging into 18 Mile Creek. However there is no BC government mapping that indicates any planned logging or road building in 18 Mile Creek Valley. The forest in 18 Mile Creek is classified by the BC government as “long-term spotted owl habitat” and is mostly class 7,8, and 9 age class, and is referred to as old growth. This designation indicates the biological importance of the valley but has no policy or legislative impact on forest or other resource management considerations. Thus 18 Mile Creek, and all the other unprotected valleys between Hope and Manning Park are available for logging.

The lower reaches of 20 Mile Creek Valley (outside the park) have long-standing approved, but as of yet un-logged, cutblocks on land formerly leased from the provincial government by International Forest Products (InterFor), and currently leased by Cattermole Timber Ltd. Some of the logging in 20 Mile Creek would be close to, but not quite visible from the Ghost Pass Trail. The proposed logging road to access the cutblocks would pass through Manning Provincial Park (if permission was granted by the BC government) between where 20 mile and 18 Mile Creeks cross Highway 3.

The forest in the lower portion of 18 Mile Creek Valley was burned by wildfire about 100 years ago and is mostly even aged and characterized as class 6 by the BC Forest Service. The middle and upper portions of the trail were not heavily impacted by historic fires and are classified as class 7, 8, and 9 forest. Class 9 forests are 250 years and older.

The Ghost Pass Trail is divided into three sections: lower, middle, and upper. Each section of the trail is about 5km long. Access to the Ghost Pass Trail, and the Mt Outram Trail are via the West Gate Parking Lot, 30 km east of the community of Hope, and are well signed by BC Parks. Simple campsites with tent pads and firepits were built by trailbuilders and are located at km 2, 5, 7, 9, and 11. No campsite currently exists at Ghost Lake. It is recommended that backpackers camp at the final campsite at km 11, and day hike the steep final section into Ghost Lake. Ghost Lake is a small, shallow and unusually warm lake, several hundred metres across, and is ideal for swimming. Camping is possible at Ghost Lake but few flat spots for tenting exist. Trail builders drank the water from 18 Mile Creek, but campers are advised to do so at their own risk.

The Ghost Pass trail is 200 km east of Vancouver and 30 km east of Hope. The trail head is within the Manning Provincial Park "West Gate parking lot". Driving time from Vancouver is 2 hours. Elevation gain along the trail is 700 metres. The entire trail is a lengthy, but ideal day hike destination. Round trip hiking time by experienced hikers is about 9 hours. Backpackers can make the final camp at km 11 in one day, but should allow at least 8 hours travel time. Water is plentiful and directly adjacent to all campsites except the campsite at km 2. The most spectacular campsite is at km11, located in a majestic grove of ancient Douglas fir and red cedar.

1.

The lower section of the trail is 4.5km long and includes the length of trail from the West Gate parking lot to the top of the hanging valley ridge (the hanging part of the valley). 2.5 km of the trail follows one of the first wagon roads built in BC, the Royal Engineers Route, and the remaining 2 km zigzags up a steep ridge gaining 300 metres elevation, marking the edge of the hanging valley. The junction of the Engineers Route and the steep zigzag portion of the Ghost Pass Trail is marked by a campsite and firepit.

2.

The middle section of the trail is 6 km long and includes the section from the top of the hanging valley ridgeline to the camp at the final 18 Mile Creek crossing at km11. Backpackers are recommended to camp at the final 18 Mile Creek crossing campground and day hike into Ghost Lake.

At the top of the hanging valley ridgeline, the trail descends gently 2km to 18 Mile Creek through mature forest and then continues 2km through old growth forest to a large avalanche chute and recent mass-wasting event. Here, the trail crosses to the east side of 18 Mile Creek at the major avalanche chute mass wasting event. Hikers know they have arrived here because it is the first time to break out of the forest and obtain a clear view up the valley. Cross the stream at the mass wasting event and follow the flags for 50 metres to pick up the trail on the east side of the creek. In early summer (June) the stream can be a bit challenging to cross (prepare to get wet up to your knees), but by mid-summer (mid-July) crossing is quite simple. The trail stays on the east side of the creek for about 2km before crossing back to the west side of the creek on a large log, and then proceeds 2km further to the last 18 Mile Creek crossing and grove of ancient Douglas fir and redcedar.

3.

The final section of the trail is 5km long and includes the stretch from the final 18 Mile Creek crossing campsite to Ghost Lake. After crossing 18 Mile Creek the trail stays on the west side of a small un-named tributary for 3km. Here the trail is relatively flat and passes through a spectacular grove of ancient fir, cedar and hemlock forest. The trail crosses 2 large avalanche chutes. For the final 2 km, the trail departs the small un-named stream and climbs steeply up a beautiful, sparsely forested ridge and breaks out in a beautiful old growth forest about 200 metres above and to the west of Ghost Lake and then proceeds down to the lake. This higher elevation route was selected for the trail because, even though it climbs 200 metres above the Lake, it is much easier to follow and was easier for trail building.

For those seeking a short cut to Ghost Lake there is an old flagged route that plunges off a ridge and drops precipitously down about 150 metres to a narrow canyon which leads to extensive cow parsnip meadows just south of Ghost Lake. Follow the flags through the cow parsnip meadows to the lake but beware of grizzly bears. This route was not selected for the trail because it is too steep and dangerous, and is critically important grizzly habitat. This route departs from the trail at a small spruce tree midway up the final 200 metre ridgeline ascent. The small spruce tree marking access to the shortcut is now well-adorned with multi-coloured flagging tape. Be very careful if following the shortcut flagged route in the rain as there are steep cliffs adjacent to the route.

