

Never Eat A Smokie Before A Big Hike

Hiking is one of my favourite activities to do in the summer. Since I moved to the North Shore about 25 years ago, I have thoroughly enjoyed getting out and exploring the beautiful trails we have in North Vancouver, most of which are only minutes away from where I live. The nice thing about the North Vancouver trail system is that there is such a huge variety of trails to pick from depending on skill level, grade of hike, or the duration of the time it takes to hike the trail. Although each hike is quite different, as I found out one evening in early July, they are all equally punishing if you are not prepared.

Quarry Rock

Rewind to early July around 5:00 p.m. I had just spoken to a friend who suggested we meet at 6:00 p.m. to hike Quarry Rock. This particular hike is relatively short, a 35-40 minute hike to the top. For the most part, it is an easy hike but because some areas of the trail are a bit steep it is classified as an intermediate hike. Once at the top you can sit on Quarry Rock and look out over the incredible, expansive view of an area of North Vancouver called Deep Cove. Feeling quite spry that day, I thought, no problem, that's a quick hike and it will be cool in the shade of the trail. It was 30 degrees that evening.

Making sure I was fuelled for the hike, I looked in my fridge to see what I could quickly make for dinner as I had to leave in 30 minutes. As I scanned the contents of my fridge I saw some leftover salmon, two boiled eggs, lots of fruit, and plenty of vegetables to make a salad. Despite all those healthy choices I could have had, because I was lost in the gluttonous throws of summertime food, I reached in and grabbed a smokie, a jar of sauerkraut, and the hot mustard. Oh, by the way, this wasn't just any smokie, it was a jumbo spicy smokie, the kind you see lederhosen clad 250 pound men eating at Oktoberfest while guzzling back loads of beer. Anyway, it was delicious, every last grissly morsel of it.

Ready To Start The Climb

Six o'clock in the evening and there we are, staring straight up the entrance to the trail, absolutely the steepest part of the hike with a steady climb for about a 1/4 km. It's hot, around 28 degrees in the shade and absolutely no breeze whatsoever. It's all good though, I'm there with a friend who knows her way around trails and will push me to keep up. After only a couple of minutes into the hike I need to stop for a drink of water, must be the dryness in the air or the exertion so far. I take a drink and can't seem to quench my thirst so just keep pouring in one of the two 8 oz water bottles I have holstered onto my new funky water bottle belt. Hmmm, funny, I drank a whole bottle already. Most of the time, I finish a whole 2 hour hike without a drop of water, must be the heat. That's okay though, I feel energized as I keep a steady pace with my friend, all the while chatting away as we climb our way up the mountain.

Quarter Of The Way Up

As we finish the steepest and toughest part of the hike, I realize I am extremely thirsty again and need to stop for another water break. I urge my friend to stop and have some water too, she must be parched as she hasn't even had a sip yet and I'm already on my

second, and last, water bottle. What? You didn't bring any water? Time seems to stop for a minute. I had to brace myself as I saw scenes from Thirst (a dark and disturbing movie about a couple who gets lost in the woods) flash before my eyes. Dear Lord, am I going to have to share my water? Her hydration quickly became less of a concern for me as I jiggled the last few ounces of water left in my second bottle. Trying to distract her from our only water source, I compliment her on her strength and speed and encourage her to keep going. As I lag behind, I'm all too aware of how incredibly thirsty I am. I can hear the last bit of water, about 4 oz, tempting me as I clumsily navigate my way up the mountain.

Strawberry Smoothie

Trying to keep my mind off my thirst, I make my point of focus the back of my friend's bright pink shirt. The colour reminds me of a strawberry fruit smoothie, the kind with yogurt so it's creamy pink, mmmm, an icy strawberry smoothie, that would be so good right now. Why didn't I pack some of the strawberries I have in the fridge, what I would do for some of that fruit right now, that would help quench my thirst. As I concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other, my mind's eye drifts to my dinner and I see the smokie. It all becomes very clear now as I see the innocent smokie looking all juicy, delicious, and yes, salty! I get it now, the conspiracy of Oktoberfest, that's why those lederhosen clad men devouring smokies are always holding a jug of beer, that's the culprit trying to take me down, the smokie!

All of a sudden, here comes a group of teenage boys, running the opposite direction through the trail straight past us. Armed with their water bottles, I can hear the jiggling of their precious water as they pass. I spot the boy with the biggest water bottle and I lean out a bit so I can make eye contact as he passes. As he approaches, something completely unexplainable happens, he picks up speed and zips right past me without even a wee glance my way. Why a teenage boy running through the mountains with his friends wouldn't stop to talk to a sweaty, teary eyed, crazed looking middle-aged woman blocking the path, is beyond me! Stunned at what just transpired, I plod along with a new project now of trying not to lick my sweaty, salty lips.

Vancouver's Driest Summer

We are almost at the top when I stop and see a creek that usually has water running through it. Like the inside of my mouth, the creek is completely dry. There goes the idea of sticking my head in the creek for a drink. Although my friend is at the highpoint of a story she is telling me, I stop at the creek's side and in a crackly desperate voice yell "the creek is dry, did you hear me, the creek is dry". At this point she is so far ahead that she can't even hear me cry the plight of the creek. Afraid of losing sight of my strawberry smoothie, I bid farewell to the poor, dry creek and try to gain some speed as we reach for the mountain peak.

At The Top

We made it! As we step out onto the top of Quarry Rock, I see a few hikers resting and sipping their water as they look out over the magnificent view. I am very careful, in my slightly dehydrated state, to watch my step so I don't slip off the cliff. What irony it would be to be so thirsty that you slip off the edge of a cliff into an ocean of salty water, never

having been able to quench your thirst again. Anyway, with a spring in her step that makes me uneasy, my friend marches straight to the edge of the rock to plant herself down to enjoy the view. While I looked like I had just given birth to twins with sweat pouring off of me and a slightly crazed look of despair, my friend looked great, happy, and perfectly content. She declared she wasn't thirsty at all which was hard for me to believe, however, when she reminded me that she didn't chow down a sauerkraut drenched spicy smokie an hour earlier, I believed her.

Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink.

Once we had sat for a few minutes while taking in the views of the ocean, we decided we better start heading back down so that I could dive into a big tub of water. With my two empty water bottles strapped to my sweaty body and my strawberry smoothie in front leading the way, we started our descent down the mountain. Because I slipped and banged my head going down a mountain trail once, I am usually very careful on the steeper sandy areas not to slip, however, in our rush to end my misery, we flew down the mountain like we were being chased by hungry wolves. With visions of water on the horizon, dust was flying as we made our way out of the extremely hot, dry, not a fountain in sight, trail. Once back out into civilization we marched straight to the corner store where my friend bought me a big bottle of water and some strawberry Twizzlers. So happy, so happy. I went to bed that night with a huge glass of water and the realization that you should never eat a smokie before a big hike.

Written by Milan Vertone 2016