

Mamquam Lake Trail

(Hard Hike)

TRAIL LOCATION—Cross the bridge over Ring Creek (see Ring Creek, page 42) and follow the trail to the stone cairn and trail junction. Take the trail that leads steeply up the ridge on your right or easterly side.

TRAIL LENGTH—From Diamond Head campground to the lake is about 7½ miles. Hiking time is about four hours there, 4½ to return.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION—The objective is a remote alpine lake. Fishing is excellent. The trout in Mamquam are large, hungry, and unsophisticated. Plan an overnight or long weekend for Mamquam because of the lengthy hike. You can camp in unspoiled wilderness.

From the junction in Ring Creek valley follow the trail to the top of the ridge below Opal Cone. Crossing the lava ridge, the trail leads down into a lovely stream-watered dell that makes an inviting rest stop. Lush alpine meadows here contrast with the bleak valley now left below. The trail now contours along the side of Opal Cone, heading generally east, with long vistas into distant valleys. Soon you climb another small ridge and the moraine area is ahead. The glacier north of the moraine is receding rapidly. A half dozen years ago the glacier face loomed above a small lakelet just to the east of Opal Cone. The melt water ponds on the moraine fill hollows scooped out by the glacier.

The trail runs straight across the moraine heading for the knoll on the far right. Crossing this great boulder-strewn, snow-drifted plain one feels something of the mystery and beauty that draws the Arctic explorer. There is the same sense of desolation and vastness; the same awareness of unconscious force.

Years ago, the route ran directly across this rocky plain. The new trail keeps well to the right and follows the base of a low ridge. After skirting the edge of a deep melt-pond, the trail starts down through a shallow gully. Suddenly you round an upthrust of rock, and a deep glacier-carved valley appears. Valley bottom is 500 feet below. The glacier has receded and now lurks, a white shadow of its former self, at the north end of the valley.

The trail now drops in a long slant to the valley floor. The valley is a jumble of rock and boulders deposited by the glacier. Between the boulders, the rich volcanic soil nourishes brilliant red mimulus and other alpine flowers. A brawling glacier stream runs down the middle of the valley. The stream, Skookum Creek, is crossed on rocks. The water is lowest before noon.

Once across Skookum Creek, the trail parallels a small clear brook for a short distance. Fill canteens here; Skookum Creek has too heavy a load of glacial silt. Now the trail heads uphill at a fairly easy grade, regaining the lost 500 feet of elevation. At the top is a ridge of almost black particles of volcanic rock dotted with green mounds of Tolmie saxifrage. Far to the left you can see the Rampart ponds. A half century ago the glacier loomed right above these

ponds in a wall of ice over 20 feet high. The volcanic mound on the right is home to a small band of mountain goats. Best time to see them is early morning.

Follow the cairns to where the graded trail starts down into the next valley. Once more you go steadily downhill; this time through a scrubby sub-alpine forest for about 700 feet of lost altitude. In about 20 minutes you reach a chain of glade-like open green meadows. You follow these for another 10 minutes and so to the lake. Idyllic campsites are everywhere, or if you prefer you can camp among the wildflowers in any of a dozen small meadows. *And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass, Hear the cool lapse of the hours pass, Until the centuries blend and blur.* (Rupert Brooke)

There are flowered meadows of a special splendour just west of the creek outlet on the lake's south end. In the moist woods here are many strange and brightly coloured fungi. Salamanders and other creatures lurk under rotting logs.

Many streamlets feed Mamquam. Take your choice between the creeks or the lake for drinking water. They are equally good. Carry a stove for cooking. There is little dry wood to be had without attacking the picturesque silver-grey snags. You can follow trails almost all around the lake. There is no marked route along the northeast side, where mountain goats patrol the crags.

Fishing is excellent. Trout of 16 inches often snatch the hook. For bait, flies or small flatfish seem best. Especially productive is the stretch of water between the eastern shore and the small island. Another fishy stretch is found close to the rocks on the northwest side of the lake.

Mamquam lake is icy cold. It warms up enough in August to make a quick dip endurable. Take lots of fly repellent; buzzing and biting flying pests can be plentiful in the evenings. The lake is often snow-free by mid-June but access trails are snowed for another month. Snow storms can blanket the moraine again in September.

For further exploration you can follow the outlet stream down to just past the first pond. Here you get intriguing glimpses of the peaks and glaciers to the east. There are several small brook-fed flowering meadows here too. If you have time and energy you can continue down, generally following the creek, along a brushy unmarked route to Eenastick Meadows. This large, mountain-circled open meadow is almost 500 feet lower than Mamquam Lake. Going down, follow the south bank of the stream until you have dropped about half the distance. Then cross the stream to avoid the steep stretch above the meadows on the right. Eenastick is an Indian word meaning "willow." The meadows are well named. Shrubby banks of willows flash silver-green among the purple lupines. The meadows, about a mile long, are walled on the east by Pyramid Peak, and almost blocked on the south by a dome of rock over 300 feet high. This is a lava plug, probably formed beneath the ice of the last Ice Age (see Geology, page 24). As well as the creek from Mamquam Lake, the meadow is watered by a number of glacier-fed streams, opaque with ground-up rock. This excursion will take about an hour down from the lake and an hour and a half back up.

Returning from Mamquam Lake to Diamond Head, there are a couple of short side trips of considerable interest. The first starts just as you reach the top

of the ridge above Mamquam Lake. Head up the knoll on your left (south). An easy scramble of a couple of hundred feet puts you on top of a little knoll with a large lookout. The panorama here stretches from the haze-shrouded valleys to the ice-capped mountains.

Back down on the ridge, follow along north on the 5,000-foot contour until you reach the Rampart Ponds. It seems hard to believe that only fifty years ago on this bleached white rock was a 20-foot wall of ice forming the glacier's edge. Incalculable tons of ice have melted away.

Continue past the ponds and you will reach a rocky moraine-littered ridge. A half hour will take you to the top. From here you get a hawk's eye look at Garibaldi Nevé. Swing east along the ridge and you can peer down on Bishop Gacier and the deep valley below Viking Ridge.

For a quick return to the trail go back to the Rampart Ponds and then head down over easy slopes to the valley bottom and the marked trail.

Garibaldi Nevé from Mamquam Ridge

