



The first 20 years of the Burnaby Outdoor Club: an interview with Jim McCavour

In 2011, the Burnaby Outdoor Club celebrates 20 years as a non-profit society that offers a variety of year round sports and social activities including walks, hiking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, cycling, kayaking, and canoeing. Through those activities, the club promotes the care and enjoyment of the outdoors environment. This is an interview with **Jim McCavour**, one of the founding members of the Burnaby Outdoor Club (“BOC”), and his recollections of those first 20 years.

In the beginning... the club began with help from Dave Fletcher, a former Burnaby parks and recreation department staff member. At its initial meeting in May 1991, 40 people met to talk about what they’d like from an outdoors club. By 1992 the fledging club was formally established with its constitution, by-laws, elected board of directors, and registered as a society with the Companies Branch in Victoria. The club is run by its volunteers.

Interviewer: Jim, what was it like in those early years of the BOC?

Jim: There were a lot of keen people right from the start. Most felt the BOC filled a void. Everyone was enthusiastic to get out and do trips with like-minded individuals. All hiking levels were involved, which added to the club’s popularity. In the first few months we had trips ranging from a walk in Deer Lake Park to summiting the Lions!

Interviewer: Jim, why did you hear about the club in 1991? How did you get involved?

Jim: In May 1991, I saw an ad in the *Burnaby Now* newspaper asking interested people to come to a meeting at the Bonsor Recreation Centre. Dave Fletcher held the meeting in a children’s play room with most of us sitting on these tiny chairs. I had wanted to become active in an outdoor club again, after not being involved in such an organization for a few years.

Club trips are limited to a maximum of 12 participants.... It was a rule that the BOC set at the beginning. In 2001 past president and another founder, Maureen Baker said, “People wanted the groups, but they didn’t want the big groups which are notorious in some of the other clubs.”

Interviewer: Jim, do you think that was a good decision back in 1991 to limit club trips to 12 people?

Jim: I wasn’t a fan of the idea initially, and still have some concerns about rigidly enforcing it. For the longer trips and tougher trails the rule was brought in to minimize impact on the environment and for safety reasons. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the organizer. This happens occasionally.

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Chester Lake, Kananaskis Country, July 2006
Photo by Gerard Laman

Being prepared and staying safeover the years, the club has often reinforced the important message of being prepared (carrying the 10 essentials) and maintains a strong focus on safety. People join the club to explore the outdoors in the company of other like-minded people and to learn to do so safely.

Interviewer: Jim, can you comment?

Jim: While we have had a few incidents (broken bones and temporarily lost people) over the last 20 years, the BOC record is excellent due to the strength of our organizers. This involves their ability to assess situations on the trail, and to assess participants' overall ability. Our liability waiver, which we implemented in the early years of the club, is also a part of the safety process.

Membership in the last few years, the membership is steady at about 90 people.

Interviewer: Jim, why do you think the club continues to attract new members every year?

Jim: The club has had ebbs and flows in terms of its yearly membership totals. But there are always people keen to explore our region, and find that the BOC's style (friendly people, smaller groups) is a good fit for them. Plus our website helps to attract new members, as well as word-of-mouth from existing members.

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Lake O'Hara area in Yoho National Park, July 2005
Photo by John Heinonen

*Favourite destinations.....*right from the beginning, the BOC was involved with arranging **multi-day trips**, at least one or more a year for 20 years. There have been backpacking, camping, cabin and hut rentals, and cycling in some of the most beautiful places on the Pacific West Coast. Hundreds of members have benefited from the volunteer hours that have gone into organizing those trips and accessed destinations they may not have got to themselves. Some of the places which are club members' favourites include Manning Provincial Park, Cathedral Provincial Park, Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park, Waterton Lakes National Park, and Mount Baker.

Interviewer: Jim, you have arranged numerous multi-day trips over the years and generously shared your experiences and know-how with others. What has been your most memorable club trip so far?

Jim: It's hard to choose just one! I could give you a Top Ten. But if pressed, I would say the trip to Mount St. Helen's and the Oregon Coast in 2002.

Interviewer: Jim, what is your "wow" moment with the BOC? Where were you? What trip was it?

Jim: Again, there are many choices, but the hikes at Lake O'Hara (Yoho National Park in the Rockies) have majestic scenery.

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Jim McCavour brings in the New Year at Barnet Marine Park, January 2005

Crazy traditions.....brrrrh, its cold! January 1, 1993 the BOC held its first Polar Bear swim and John Templeton was activity organizer.

Interviewer: Jim, when did you first join in the club's tradition of the annual Polar Bear swim? Some years you were the only one to brave the cold waters close to Burnaby!

Jim: I think my first New Year's dip was 1994 at English Bay. In 1998 or 1999, I started organizing the event at Barnet Marine Park to make it a true Burnaby experience. I haven't had many willing participants join me in the water, but lots of people come to cheer me on and for the "après" social.

Interviewer: Looking back over the past 20 years, what makes you especially proud of the BOC? What has the club done really well that stands out for you?

Jim: The club has constantly provided a huge variety of events, all organized by willing volunteers. We would not be in existence if people had not stepped forward to help, and that tradition continues today.

Interviewer: Jim, you've been a member since 1991. Why is the BOC important to you?

Jim: I enjoy the trips and social functions, the friendships made, and to be made in the future. I also like coordinating hikes and walks. It's great to see the club still thriving after twenty years, and to have been a part of it since the beginning.

Interview conducted by Jackie Gill.

For more information, trips reports and photos, visit the BOC's web site at www.burnabyoutdoor.com