

Yaron Sidney Butterfield

He Didn't Leave a Note

OUR HIKE TO ELSAY LAKE

Driving into the Mt Seymour parking lot in North Vancouver, I start thinking about the long hike our dog Plato and I were about to embark on. The destination, Elsay Lake. It's a calm, peaceful place, geographically not far from the city, but relatively remote. The rugged trail is by no means easy, but this is the only way in, and we have taken this route many times and know what to expect. Should be faster this time though, as I don't plan on taking many breaks. On this sunny but brisk Saturday morning, Aug 27, I anticipate arriving around 1-1:30pm. I want to get there as soon as possible to meet my twin brother Noam and our buddy Chad who headed in the day before. Being just the two of us, I hope we don't run into any bears as we have done in the past!

We had barely got two feet out of the car, when we were swarmed by mosquitoes and black flies. They're not the quickest bugs, easy to swat, but the sheer number of them makes it impossible to keep up without succumbing to a few bites. Not wanting to give the bugs any more opportunity to attack, we started a fast pace across the parking lot towards the trailhead, but paused when Noam's car caught the corner of my eye. It appears as if the door is open. Hmm. Maybe they just rushed off in excitement and forgot? As I got closer, I noticed the glove box was also open, but assumed that was intentional to deter thieves by showing there is nothing of value to steal. Although the possibility that they were broken into creeps into my mind, I convince myself that's it unlikely, and just close everything.

"This your car?" A man says in a firm, direct voice as he approaches me.

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"No, my brother's," I responded with a slightly perplexed tone as I notice 'SEARCH and RESCUE' on his jacket.

"Well, he's been reported missing..." he says.

Now, I'm worried. He ushers me to follow him, so we headed to a Search and Rescue van at the other side of the lot. Inside, there's a big whiteboard that has my brother's name, phone number and address scribbled on it! My heart started beating as if I was already in the middle of a steep incline (the first of which begins almost immediately at the start of this particular hike)!

I am both scared and curious why my brother's information is here! As I massage Plato's neck, I ask what's going on. Again, I explained that Noam and Chad left Friday. A loud helicopter sound landing outside interrupts me. "And the plan was for us to meet them there today," I continue.

Then the van door opens and a uniformed man, looking like the pilot, steps in and asks, "Is he the snowboarder?"

"Huh?", I shook my head in disbelief.

"No it's his brother", one of the others says.

"My brother wasn't snowboarding?!" I exclaim.

Now they all seem really confused, and asked me to wait outside. The flies were all over us again, as if they were sitting outside just waiting for our return. Plato was shaking his head, slapping his tail, chewing his fur, and clearly very uncomfortable, with red marks starting to show up all over his body.

Getting impatient, I considered just going, when one of the crew steps out and asks "So what were you planning to do?".

"Well, we're going to hike to the lake."

"No you're not", he calmly says.

"What do you mean?"

"There's a lot of the snow on the trails this year. We can't let you and the dog hike in alone."

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"Now what to do?" I thought. I envisioned Chad and Noam at the lake waiting and expecting me to arrive in the afternoon. "They're going to be extremely worried if I don't show up!"

They huddled for another 10 minutes which seemed like half an hour.

"We are going to take you."

"In the helicopter? To the lake!?", I exclaim excitedly.

"Yes."

I mentally leaped in excitement and I tell Plato what's happening. Having never taken him on this hike before, he has no idea what he's missing. At the same time, I had no idea what it was like to fly in! Grinning from ear to ear, as I try to imagine Noam and Chad's faces when they see me and Plato jump out of a helicopter! I hope he doesn't get too nervous.

Having hiked in the hilly trails through the trees, along the side of the steep mountain and across the rock cliffs many times before, taking us taking us up to 6 and a half hours once to get to the lake, it felt very surreal to be above it in just a few minutes. Plato is calm and appears just as much in wonder about everything as I was! We circle the lake once getting lower as we go. As we approach the landing spot by the cabin, my smile got bigger and bigger in anticipation of surprising them. Plato jumps out of the chopper first practically before it came to a full stop.

Sure enough, Chad and Noam's looked stunned. Laughing, I rush out and give them a big hug.

"You've caused us a lot of trouble", the co-pilot says to Noam. "We thought you were someone else; you didn't leave a note in your vehicle..." As the helicopter takes off, we start to share each other's stories and continue into the twilight with the warm glow of the campfire.

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"It took us, nine hours to get here!" Chad says massaging his legs in obvious discomfort. "Two day hikers blocked off the main trail and put down an arrow which led us on a trail half way down to Indian Arm. When we caught up with the hikers, they said they were blazing a new trail to Indian Arm and blocked off the trail assuming there would not be any hikers in these rough conditions."

"It took us about 4 hours to get back on course!" Noam adds.

"Nine hours! Well it took me 5 minutes!" I laughed. What was most important to me though, was that we were all together sooner rather than later. We still had to hike back on the Sunday. Plato was exhausted. I wonder if he expected a helicopter to come in a bring us back!

Three days later, the local newspaper published a piece, "*Rescue team called out three times on weekend.*" Our story was mentioned half way through the article:

"...four rescuers were seconded to Mount Seymour to answer a report of a missing snowboarder. A well-meaning Seymour staff had earlier spotted a snowboarder headed for the hills and figured he was connected to a car found parked in Seymour's lot at the end of his shift. North Vancouver RCMP couldn't contact the vehicle owner and no note was left on the vehicle's dashboard, so NSR was mobilized. A helicopter was launched in the morning, but it was all for naught. The brother of the vehicle owner arrived and explained the man and a friend had hiked to Elsay Lake and camped overnight."

- North Shore News, September 01, 1999

All my brother had to do was leave a note or park in long term parking. Secretly, I was glad he didn't; considering the free helicopter trip Plato and I enjoyed over the beautiful mountains, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way! We still aim to visit the lake every few year or so. It does take longer to hike to get there than it used to, but never 9 hours...and not 5 minutes either.

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Rescue team called out three times on weekend

Bob Mackin

News Reporter

NORTH Shore Rescue is drawing closer to tying a record.

No party is being planned to mark this milestone, however.

The volunteer search and rescue organization had three missions this weekend, increasing the year-to-date total to 51.

With four months to go in 1999, odds are that the team will tie — if not break — last year's record mark of 68.

NSR joined Grouse Mountain Safety Patrol Friday night at 6:30 p.m. to rescue a male hiker in his 50s who was stranded on a cliff band off Little Goat Mountain.

A signal fire created by the man had been spotted earlier by helicopter. A Grouse patrol member established voice contact with the North Shore man while two NSR mountaineers rappelled to the hiker. A ground-based rope evacuation was used because nightfall was approaching and the man was not injured. The operation was completed by 3:30 a.m. It was the second time in a month NSR and Grouse staff co-operated in a rescue.

"The Grouse Safety Patrol and NSR have a very high regard for each other, especially as a result of the Grouse Grind avalanche rescue operation earlier this year," said NSR search and rescue manager Tim Jones.

In the middle of the Grouse operation, four rescuers were seconded to Mount Seymour to answer a report of a missing snow-

boarder. A well-meaning Seymour staffer had earlier spotted a snowboarder headed for the hills and figured he was connected to a car found parked in Seymour's lot at the end of his shift.

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Jones said NSR will meet with BC Parks and Mount Seymour officials to avoid a repeat.

"The problem up there is there's no registry box, there's no overnight parking policy," he said. "That's what led to this problem. We

had an unnecessary search."

NSR's third call in two days came at 9 p.m. Saturday to find two stranded male hikers along the trail route between Lynn Headwaters Park and Grouse Mountain.

The men, in their late 20s, did not register before setting off on the trek. They were accompanied by pet dogs.

They were found together at 3:30 a.m. near Crown Pass. One of the dogs, suffering from an injured paw, had to be carried out on a makeshift stretcher.

Jones said he recommends against taking pets on such long excursions.

"Family pets that aren't used to long treks will injure their paws and become quite lame," he said. "You're asking pets to go on hikes they've never done before."



