

Outdoor Discoveries
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Wildflower Season in Full Bloom
Easy Mountain Treks at Silver Star

By Laurie Carter & Bruce Kemp (updated July 2006)

Photos by Laurie Carter

“The Indian Paintbrush flowers are really spectacular.” That’s the word from Roseanne Van Ee, Silver Star Mountain’s veteran nature guide, who credits generous spring sunshine and warmth with an early start to the blossom season.

This woman really knows her wildflowers – and trees – and rocks . . .

Three hours on a mountain trail with Roseanne is better than a guided hike through your encyclopaedia. And you don’t have to be an Edmund Hillary-clone to enjoy it. Designed with up-hill-averse people like my partner in mind, this tour lets you ride to the top and walk down the mountain.

From the moment I stepped off the chairlift, I was bowled over by the knowledge Roseanne is so eager to share.

“I really enjoy the natural environment and showing people about it,” she says. “I’ve always been an outdoorsy type. When I was a teen, they called me the nature nut.”

And the nature nut stuck with her passion, working for National and BC Parks and, for the last few years, offering interpretive services and nature tours at Silver Star.

Standing on the mountaintop at 1884 metres (6280 feet), I felt a high-altitude chill as Roseanne described the glacial forces that shaped the Okanagan Valley. On a clear day, the view extends from New Denver to Revelstoke taking in the Monashee, Valhalla, Selkirk and Bugaboo ranges. It’s an incredibly diverse collection of ecosystems including the transition from the hottest and driest in Canada to the second wettest – the interior rain forest.

Standing there, it was easy to see why native people climbed this summit each spring to map out their hunting plans for the season. As Roseanne described their annual routines, she dipped into her backpack like a magician reaching into a hat and whipped out a tightly woven cedar basket. Historic photographs followed.

“I’ve worked with the Okanagan people and elders and they’ve passed on a lot of knowledge,” she says.

Down the trail, she stopped to cut a stalk of cow parsnip (also known as Indian rhubarb) and peeled back the outer layer. The celery-like stalk, which she passed around the group for us to taste (bland and faintly soapy), was once a staple food.

Her hands-on blend of history and nature extended to every part of the tour. At the site of the Silver Queen Mine, another dip into the pack produced historic photos, then a lump of fool’s gold, as she told the story of nearby O’Keefe Ranch.

At a tumbledown log cabin we learned about the transition from miner's camp to ski resort. As we descend the mountain she explained why it's okay to pick the berries but not the wildflowers.

No two tours are alike. Roseanne is constantly adapting to the unexpected, "like coming upon a bear digging a hole and getting the people to stop and carefully back up." And she's designed a selection of tours to concentrate on different areas of interest and hiking ability including three easy one-and-a-half hour walks.

Birders can take a morning tour to catch sub-alpine birds in action and add a few species to their life lists. History buffs hear tales of days gone by during a stroll on paved pathways. And the more adventurous will find out about black bears and what they like to eat on an easy trek along Silver Star's slopes. Just be prepared to back up – carefully.

Mountain Wildflower Tours run every day 1 to 4:30 p.m.

Before you go. . .

Silver Star Mountain Resort is 22 kilometres northeast of Vernon. Follow the signs from Hwy 97. Look for tour descriptions at: www.skisilverstar.com choose Summer Activities then Wildflower, Nature & History Tours.

Bookings and information are at Ski Dazzle Ticket office: 250-558-6010