

NINE LIVES OF BRIAN CREER



**BY BRIAN
CREER**

**PLUS
SEVERAL
MORE**



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01

Climbing the Pinnacle on the Back of the Black Tusk.

A group of 4 of my friends and I climbed the Black Tusk in Garibaldi Park in July 1935, and as we were to learn, every time we attempted a climb, the weather was so unpredictable that snow started to fall just after we started or as we reached the Peak.

After I saw the Pinnacle, I wanted to climb it regardless of the weather. My friends were not so foolhardy as to attempt this additional climb and turned back to return to the Black Tusk Meadows. The volcanic origin of the Black Tusk is easily recognized because of the repeated nearly vertical slabs. On the North side, an enormous slab had been partly detached from the main upthrust. It rose about 50 feet from the main peak, where it was about 50 feet in diameter at the base, tapering to 20 feet at the top. It was called the Pinnacle.

On the North side of the Pinnacle, the Main Tusk fell away at about 70 to 90 degrees for at least 1,000 feet. I climbed down to the base of the Pinnacle and had no serious problems climbing up to the top. At that point erosion had resulted in the top of the Pinnacle being covered with a slanting pile of loose rock. As I arrived, snow commenced to fall.

After a brief pause, I started to move down toward the edge of the solid rock. Unfortunately, I was unable to move in control because of the slant of the now slippery surface. After two or three uncontrolled slides with desperate stops after only a few feet from the top, I realized that my chances of going to the edge and stopping there to reach a foothold on the vertical face, were nil. I resigned myself to the likelihood of a fall to my death.

Finally, I made a careful sliding descent on my stomach towards the edge. "Guess what?" I would not be composing this report 71 years later if I had not been successful in stopping and gaining a foothold a couple of feet down from the edge. I finished the climb down the Pinnacle with no problems and then climbed up to the peak of the Tusk to follow my friends down towards the Meadows.

02

Climbing Sentinel Peak Also in Garibaldi Park

Our overall objective was to circumnavigate Garibaldi Lake while climbing each of the surrounding Peaks as we came to them. At the East end of Garibaldi Lake, Sentinel Peak is located, bordered on the North side by a deep valley, and consists of a highly steep North Face. A glacier bordered on the South side and was not nearly as steep as the North Face.

We decided to take the easy route and arrived at the peak somewhat bored. Our relative ignorance of climbing led us to decide to climb down the North Face. This was an average 70-degree slope for about 1,000 feet, commencing with a vertical section down a wide crack. About 100 feet down, there was a boulder, at least 10 feet in diameter, jammed in the crack. We decided to rappel down to the flat top of the boulder. This we did with no problem.

Once the five of us were there, I remained on the boulder while my friends continued to rappel to a ledge about 50 feet below. Once they were down that far, I planned to pull the rappel rope down from the original hold and reset it on the boulder to continue the descent. Fortunately, two of my friends had moved out to the side about 20 feet while the other two moved out to the opposite side. I was standing on the edge of the boulder talking to those below when the boulder came loose and rolled down between the boys below.

I, of course, started to fall along with it. However, as I was falling I reached over behind me and got one hand on the rappel ropes and then swung around to get my other hand also on the ropes. I continued to fall sliding down the ropes and lost most of the skin on my hands.

Finally, I slowed down and eventually landed on the shelf – where my friends were cowering – after their close call from being crushed by the rock. Fortunately, this experience smartened us up, and we climbed back up to the top of the Peak, went down the side we had originally come up, and continued in the usual snowfall.

Our next objective was the peak known as Table Mountain or the Teacup because of the hole through it at the Western end, which makes it look like an inverted teacup. This peak is an extremely difficult climb which we were considering rather nervously when the darn snow started to fall once again and we realized that an attempt to climb would be extremely hazardous.

The remainder of our trip around the lake was relatively uneventful except that we ran out of food. However, we found large Kamloops trout in the pool in a creek that drained into Garibaldi Lake, called Mimulus Creek. One of our party had a fishing line and a hook, which he dangled in front of several fish, but the fish were just not interested. We finally caught several by jumping on them after we scared them out of the pool and down the creek in shallow water.

03

Solo Climbing North of the Lions

After having learned some of the basics of rock climbing on both the Western and Eastern Lions, I decided to go North between the two Lions to some peaks that looked challenging but for which I did not even know the names. One of them must have been Brunswick. I spent nearly a week all alone, climbing anything that looked interesting.

At one point I was shuffling along a ledge. It was about 400 feet up towards a peak on a nearly vertical slope. A promising handhold on my left side required a stretch up and over while on my tip toes. The promise was not realized. About 5 pounds of rock came loose in my hand and left me balancing on my tip toes with the rock in my hand. I had been led to believe that if there is sufficient time, some previous experience will flash through one's mind when one is about to die.

My flash was of my High School Physics class and a theorem related to my present situation. The theorem was "To each action there is an equal and opposite reaction". I carefully rotated my arm around and threw the rock out into space. The theorem worked and I fell forward against the cliff face.

Not wanting to tempt fate any further, I worked my way down the cliff and returned to the Lions where I enjoyed some more interesting solo climbing.

04

Life and Near-Death as a Hobo

At one point during the Great Depression, a friend persuaded me to go Gold Panning somewhere in the Okanagan. Since we had no funds for traveling expenses, we hitched a ride on a freight train. There was no gold, and eventually, we separated, and I hoboed back East as far as Winnipeg before returning to British Columbia.

I had been chased off a train by the Railway police at Kamloops, and while trying to get back on, while the train was in motion, I jumped for the fourth rung on the ladder on a box car, which I had scouted in advance and determined was empty and unlocked. To my horror, I only made the third rung which left my legs dragging on the tracks just where the incoming tracks were joining the main line from the railway yard.

After bashing my knees a couple of times, I was able to reach up to the fourth rung and was momentarily safe. Sometimes under excessive strain one can perform physical feats which are beyond one's normal capacity. Fortunately, this was one of those times. The wooden box car had supporting angle iron reinforcements on the side walls, along which I finally scrambled to the closed but not locked sliding door which I had scouted before attempting to board the train.

Swimming the Fraser

Later on, below the Fraser River Suspension Bridge (just upstream from where the Alexandria Bridge is now), I had assumed that no one knew I was in the box car and opened the door and sat there swinging my legs and enjoying the fresh air.

Unknown to me, one of the Kamloops police thought that I had managed to get on the train and rode along in the crummy from where he saw me. At this point, he stopped the train and chased me out of the box car, leaving me on the side of the river with no road and the prospect of a two-mile walk up to the Bridge, where I might find a motorist willing to give me a lift down to the next train stop, which was Yale.

This prospect did not appeal to me, so I decided to swim across the river, (which was about 200 yards wide at that point) , since I had unlimited confidence in my swimming ability. The spot where I had been marooned was just downstream from a big eddy on my side of the river which was opposite to the highway, and from my viewpoint on the railway tracks the river did not look particularly threatening so I went down to the beach where I took all my clothes off, and tied them on a plank which I found. As it turned out, it was fortunate that I was wearing swim trunks and did not take them off. Within a few moments of launching out into the upstream current of the eddy, I realized that the eddy fence at the top of the eddy was enormous (at least 5 feet high), which had not been at all obvious when I looked down 200 feet from the railway.

There was nothing I could do about it then. I was swept into the mainstream where I lost my plank and clothes, while struggling with all my ability to get up to the surface. As I reached the surface I found that there was a bend in the river and the mainstream was returning me to the side I had started from.

Realizing that crossing the river was really impossible, I tried to return to the original side of the river. After another few minutes of strenuous swimming, another bend in the river carried me partly across the river again.

This time I finally made it to shore. I staggered up the beach. There I fell down semiconscious for a short time before going up to the road. In those days, there was not much traffic on the single lane Fraser Highway at that point, and it was some time before any car came along going down towards Yale. With me trying to hitchhike with only a bathing suit for clothes, after several cars had passed me by, I was lucky enough to get a ride. The driver could not believe that I had swum across the river. Once in Yale, I telegraphed my parents and got some money for a pair of pants and train fare to Vancouver. Traveling on the train, with no shirt or shoes, I was rather conspicuous, but at least I was still alive.

06

Another Railway Story

I had been hiking along the PGE railway tracks in West Van and was halfway across the bridge at 18th Street when I heard a train coming. I had to get off the tracks quickly as the train went around a bend about a hundred feet away. Without giving it any consideration, I dived off the bridge into the creek and as I entered the water, I remember thinking "I hope the water is deep enough." IT WAS!!

07

Another, Another Railway Story

George Friend and I had taken a day hike from Green Lake up the PGE, to the juncture of the Green River and the Pemberton Valley. As we approached the valley, the mosquitoes attacked us in the millions, so we turned back south along the railway. As the evening progressed, we came to the area of Nairn Falls.

We were extremely thirsty and were tempted to go down towards the falls for a drink. I knew that there was a good chance of falling into the river and going over the Falls, so I insisted on continuing South along the railway till we came to a safe access to the river. The next time I went by Nairn Falls in the daylight, I was very glad we had not gone anywhere near the fall in the dark. I am told that a number of people have fallen in and drowned at this point.

Canoeing in the Ocean and Early Days on Rivers

During my first job, which was working in the pulp mill at Port Alice, I purchased my first canoe during a holiday trip to Vancouver. This cedar strip canoe was 25 years old but in spotless condition having been cared for by an elderly couple who actually loved it. As I paddled away from them at Spanish Banks, they were crying because they were no longer capable of paddling.

I was relatively inexperienced and in paddling alone, as I frequently did, I found that the winds, which usually blow most strongly during the daytime, made paddling difficult, so I paddled a lot at night. On one occasion I had paddled towards the mouth of Quatsino Sound and in the dark did not realize that I was actually on the ocean. I had never been on an open ocean and was unaware of what ocean swells can do.

Suddenly I heard a swishing noise ahead of me. I was afraid that the noise had been made by a whale. However, there was nothing I could do about it, so I continued to paddle and a few moments later heard the same noise behind me. In the dim light of the stars, I was able to see that where I had been only a moment before, was an island with water cascading off it. I had crossed over a reef on the top of an ocean swell. If the swell had passed by an instant earlier, I would have rolled off the reef and never been heard of again.

I continued my canoeing education by paddling in a creek called Marble Creek, which entered Quatsino Sound and could be accessed from Port Alice. The creek passed through a series of sandstone ledges that had been eroded into many caves, which were very dangerous to swimmers.

That is what I was a great deal of the time. In the course of a few months, my beautiful canoe aged by another 25 years. I finally realized that some flotation was required and put a 4-pound jam tin in the bow and another in the stern. Nowadays, 400 pounds of flotation is recognized as essential.

Here goes with # 9, the last one of my theoretical lifespans.

09

*Canoeing on Queen Charlotte
Sound and Johnstone Strait*

At the end of my year at Port Alice, I decided to paddle back to Vancouver, despite the fact that it was December and not ideal weather for paddling. I had no particular trouble paddling down Alice Arm and up to Coal Harbour, where I had the canoe trucked over to Port Hardy.

The initial part of the journey down Queen Charlotte Strait, South past Sointula and Alert Bay was challenging because of the low temperature in December. The entrance to Johnston Strait found me paddling at midnight through the falling snow just off the Cracoft Island Lighthouse. Because of my ignorance of tidal currents, I did not realize that I was bucking an outflowing tide from the Johnston Straits.

I had stayed in the same place, paddling vigorously for nearly an hour. Finally, I said to myself, “This is stupid,” and gave up. I paddled back several miles to Port McNeil and took a Union Steamship back to Vancouver.

10

Climbing on the South Side of the Eastern Lion

Along with my younger son, Mark, and an ex-student of mine, Al Smythe, I climbed the Eastern Head of the Lions on a hot Indian Summer Day in September. While climbing, I was a little disturbed to note that many of the handholds on the route, which I had memorized during a number of previous climbs, did not seem to exist anymore.

Was it in my mind or had there been a rockslide? I did not want to worry the kids, so I said nothing about the problem. Anyway, we made it to the top without too much trouble and then decided to rappel down the unfamiliar area. I set the rappel rope around a good, solid tree, and each of us rappelled down to where there was a ledge. When I went to pull the rappel rope down, it would not come. It had somehow jammed.

I climbed back up and set a new hold and then rappelled down once more.

This time, even with both boys supporting me, I could barely reach the end of the rope from the ledge, and to my horror, it was jammed again. I had to make another trip up, and by now, with the exposure to the Indian Summer sun and the exertion, I was sweating profusely and quite worried about the eventual outcome. Thank goodness the rope came down this last time. We were finally able to get off the face into a treed area.

I was pretty well exhausted both mentally and physically at this point, but the kids never realized the danger we had been in.

These stories were initially supposed to duplicate the NINE LIVES OF A CAT applied to my many near-death experiences. I have just realized that at this point in the report I have already exhausted 10 of my 9 lives.

There are several more as yet not reported.

One of Several Near Misses While Working as a Logger

I had succeeded in getting my first job in the Logging Industry due to a fortunate meeting between my mother and the wife of the owner of Black's Loggers Agency. After a brief conversation during which my mother mentioned that I was currently unemployed, Mrs. Black said that if I wanted a job, she would let her husband know and he would see that I got one.

When I went to the Logger's Agency, I was dismayed to see 40 or so unemployed loggers sitting around waiting for a job. Anticipating that the same problem in my case would be even worse since I had no experience, I went to one of the wickets and gave my name when it was requested. The attendant looked at a piece of paper on the counter and said, "Where would you like to go?"

He suggested several logging camps and I selected Merrill, Ring and Wilson near Squamish because that was closest to my home in Vancouver. During the 8 years of my logging career this was always the reception I got at the Agency.

I started as a wood splitter on a Steam Donkey and was soon promoted to be a whistle punk and over the years eventually became a Chokerman, a Chaser, a High Rigger, a Cat Driver, and a Railway Engineer. I worked at Logging Camps on the Sunshine Coast at Roberts Creek and Powell River. Then on Vancouver Island out of Duncan, at Jordan River on the West Coast, at Great Central Lake and finally out of Port Alberni.

12

Cat Driver in Powell River

While working as Cat Driver at Powell River I accidentally bumped into a rotten snag which fell across the cat. Fortunately, the steel sides of the seat I was in, supported the trunk of the snag which would otherwise have broken both my legs.

13

Chokerman

On another occasion, while working as a chokerman I was standing on a log beside another chokerman. We were about 30 feet from the turn. A turn is a bundle of several logs.

As it started to move, it hung up on a stump and the trailing end of one of the logs swung around towards where we were standing. As the end approached me, I instinctively flopped belly down on the log on which we had been standing.

In so doing I drove a splinter from a broken branch on our log right through my upper lip, which was painful but not too serious.

Unfortunately, my partner did not see the log hurtling towards us and the log killed him after passing over me as I lay flat on the log on which we had been standing.

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Great Central Lake

Years later, at Great Central Lake while working as a Back Rigger on a high Lead show, I was walking down under the High Line cable at the end of the day, following the crew back to the Bunkhouse when the Engineer on the Donkey Engine accidentally dropped the cable (which was over two inches in diameter). Fortunately, it passed through the lines of loggers going down the hill, including me, without hitting anyone.

It was a shock to see the line which had dropped and cut into the dirt several inches right between the men on either side, missing many of them by only inches. The engineer got into a rowboat immediately and left the site because if the crew had arrived before he left, he would have been severely punished by them for this error.

Canoeing and Kayaking on the Rivers of British Columbia

There is always a certain danger in taking part in aquatic activities. Spending more than 45 seconds under water is likely to result in a fatality.

However, development of safety skills and following safety practices can reduce these hazards to a tolerable level. A reasonable estimate as to the number of canoeists in British Columbia is 5,000 and 2,500 river kayakers. In River kayaking, the fatality rate has been about one per year up to the year 2000. My own personal near misses on two occasions have occurred by getting sucked down in small whirlpools. (8 to 10 feet in diameter). In both cases I was wearing a P.F.D. with 1 1/2 times as much buoyancy as is recommended by the National standards.

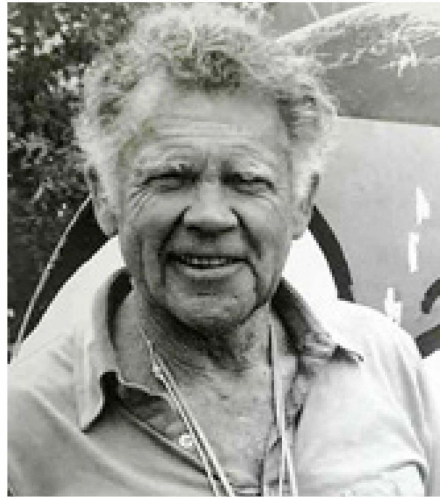
This precaution resulted in my returning RELATIVELY quickly to the surface. I faced many life-threatening experiences after capsizing and swimming, but I must give my large P.F.D. credit for my survival.

During 70 years of river canoeing and kayaking, I am thankful that I have learned to practice safe boating.

Black Canyon Whirlpool

The Black Canyon of the Fraser River consists of an enormous whirlpool on the inside of a right-angle bend in the river. On one occasion I miscalculated above the canyon and capsized and was sucked into the whirlpool. I was hanging on to the painter of my canoe as I followed it down the centre of the whirlpool. I remember looking up towards the surface from about 10 or 15 feet and realizing that I should not follow the canoe any further. When I released the painter, the centrifugal force of the whirlpool threw me out of the whirlpool, and my big PFD returned me almost immediately to the surface. A relatively short swim got me ashore. The canoe stayed down for 45 minutes before returning to the surface half a mile downstream with some damage from hitting the bottom of the river.

In Memory of Brian



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