

# The Peak of the Day

By John Joyce

“Hello, and welcome aboard the Grouse Mountain Skyride! Relax and enjoy yourself as we take you on a one-mile aerial journey to the top of Grouse Mountain, 3700 feet or 1100 meters above the city of Vancouver.”

Grouse Mountain is a coastal mountain located about 15 minute drive from Vancouver, Canada. The lights at the top make it a landmark up to 80km away. It is a key tourist destination spot along with the Capilano Suspension Bridge, which one invariably passes to arrive at the car park of 6400 Nancy Greene Way. A gondola or as it is known locally a red Skyride takes locals and visitors to the summit where there is a myriad of year round activities such as skiing in the winter and mountain biking in the summer.

It was a foggy Sunday morning and John Meadows from Wakefield Quebec was greeting the folk on the half empty red Skyride. His portable radio crackled as he continued.

“Below us is the man-made Capilano Lake, which provides Vancouver with about one third of its fresh water supply and is contained to the left by the Cleveland Dam”

The curtain of fog prevented any view: not an ideal August day to be taking the Skyride or doing a hike. Amongst the people on board were two colorfully dressed mountain cyclists of indeterminate sex, a Spanish speaking school party and two couples with Crystal Cruises luggage labels on their bags denoting them as cruise ship trippers. Many of the school party had names such as Monterrey, Real Madrid and Atlante written on their backpacks. A couple of the girls were sporting University of Saskatchewan sweatshirts. In the corner sat a man of about 40 years old dressed for serious hiking with boots, backpack, water and rope. The name of the hiker was Paul Tully. He sometimes stared at the floor and sometimes at his watch, which was also a heart monitor. Around his neck he wore a Skyride pass.

“One mile down the Capilano River you will find a salmon hatchery, and the Capilano Suspension Bridge. Beyond the lake rises the residential area known as the British Properties which is recognized for its fine homes and gardens.”

No one seemed to listen to John’s talk. Paul had heard it many times before and his mind was far away. He had missed the other hikers in the car park at the base of the Skyride. According to some others hikers who had elected not to go up due to the fog, two of the group had taken the previous Skyride and would wait for him at the top. Why had they gone ahead? He was not late, or was he? Where at the top? Was it unwise to attempt Goat Mountain on such a day? It was never clear if cell phones worked up there;

they did in certain areas.

Things were not going well at work. His wife Anne-Marie wanted him to go for a job interview. She was supposed to be on this hike but at the last moment decided against it. "It's too foggy for hiking. Even the North Shore Rescue people won't be able to find anyone today"

"To the left, is the Lions Gate Bridge, which spans the entrance to the Burrard Inlet, one of the largest harbours on the West Coast. The bridge leads into the 1000-acre Stanley Park, two thirds which is in its natural regenerated state. The park is home to beaches picnic grounds, and our world-renowned aquarium."

Paul was an electrical engineer with a bar code reading company. He had to solve a battery problem for a new smaller terminal within a few days. *Could the box shape be changed for a different battery?* His mind flirted with the surroundings. What speed were they travelling at relative to the car park? He pulled out some paper and started the calculations. Distance divided by time. One mile was 1.6km. The journey would take six minutes. He wrote down  $1.6/6$  which was km/min so km per hour would be  $1.6/6$  times 60. They were travelling at 16.09km per hour. Had he performed the calculation correctly? More importantly, he hoped the Skyride designers had done their mathematics correctly. He suddenly felt someone looking at him. It was one of the girls wearing the University Of Saskatchewan sweatshirts. She looked away. Paul thought." Victoria Beckham or Posh Spice once wore a University Of Saskatchewan sweat shirt and changes the economy of the Province of Saskatchewan; I mean there are only 999,000 of them living there, and that's midweek during the Spring." John Meadow's voice rambled on:

*"To the left of Stanley Park, those large white sails are part of Canada Place cruise ship terminal. Right now, the Crystal Harmony cruise ship is in the harbour. By the end of October, more than one million passengers will pass through the port of Vancouver."*

The two couples smiled at the mention of the cruise ship. One of the cyclists started pumping their tires. This was the new focal point of the journey since nothing could be seen outside. Paul thought "they would have to inflate more the higher they go since the atmosphere is less." A second glance determined it was the girl cyclist who effortlessly pumped away. Paul thought this looks like a scene from an opera, "I wonder if she will start singing an Italian aria," thought Paul.

"English bay, and beyond that is Point Grey with the University of British Columbia located at its tip. In the distance, across the Strait of Georgia, you can see the mountains of Vancouver Island."

The girl student approached Paul with a camera.

"¿Me excusa, fotografía?" Paul took two pictures of the elated students.

“¿De dónde usted viene?” But he didn’t understand the first reply. Somewhere in Mexico he gathered.

“¿Por favor sir, puedo tomar su fotografía?”

Paul posed, hoping he made the mark of a local. He felt the eyes of John Meadows on them. One of the cruisers approached Paul with a sausage food odour and asked in a Germanic accent to take their photograph. Again he didn’t quite understand where they came from. Might be Russia but not Russia this week. The trip was starting to become a scene out of a Lonely Planet library video. The cyclist was still pumping her tires. The Mexican students were congregating around John Meadows. He was not sure if they understood a word but he had an audience.

“Drawing your attention back to the North Shore, to my right are the twin peaks of the Lions. Originally called the sisters, these are the highest peaks in the Capilano River Valley, at 5600 and 5400 feet above sea level.”

Paul lived within walking distance of the Skyride and often travelled it for outdoor activities or to show visitors around the area. Going up any mountain allowed one to see things differently. *Was Anne Marie right? Should he apply for the engineering manager position? Would he have to buy a new suit for the interview? Anne Marie said it would be good experience to apply. He liked his job but knew it was insecure. What about a career change? What else could he do?* He felt his ears pop as the Skyride went higher. *How much longer? Were they half way yet?*

“We are now approaching the first of two towers, and as we pass over the tram will sway slightly, so you may like to steady yourself. This also marks the half waypoint to our trip. As we pass the other car, it may appear it is moving more quickly, but we both attached to the same cable and travel at exactly the same speed.”

There was a fairground ride “woo...” as the air travellers swayed past a tower and passed the other tram. Paul formulated that their relative speed was 32 km/hr and wondered what was their weight? Mass times speed and he would know the momentum. Was he an object type person? Anne Marie said he should try to become a people person.

*“If you have any questions on the way up, please don’t hesitate to ask. My name is John Meadows, and I will do my best to try to answer them for you.”*

This seemed the cue to start eating. The Russians brought out bread and sausages; the Mexican students produced potato chips and oranges. The cyclists swigged from their bottles and Paul munched some trail mix. John Meadows was given potato chips and slices of oranges and would spend the rest of his

life in Mexico playing soccer. The higher they went the louder they all talked. Several of the students were helping the cyclists to adjust their disk brakes pointing and speaking without any verbs being spoken. They swayed at the second tower and the grey curtain surrounding them vanished. They were above the clouds and the students cheered and clapped and the Russians stomped their feet. They could see the neighbouring Lions and trees and trees.

Paul thought, *“Well we just need the Vancouver Symphony to belt out a couple of standards, George Harrison’s Here comes the Sun, some Grieg’s Peer Gynt Suite, or Copland’s Appalachian’s Spring. And finish with “Running Back to Saskatoon”, by the Guess Who. I wonder if the Symphony folk know it? An orange rolled across to him. Paul thought it would be fun to calculate the orange’s speed relative to the ground. The Mexican girl student walked quickly to him to pick it up. She did not smile. Maybe you have problems too, Paul thought. We always think the people younger than ourselves have no problems.*

*“¡Una qué visión hermosa!”* Paul said pointing to the view.

*“Si. Mucho señor.”* She rushed back to her giggling friends. *Maybe I am becoming a people person?* Suddenly they were there as the walkway appeared with a queue of download travellers. The Russians quickly hid their food and the cyclists attached their helmets. Uniformed workers with triangular bar code readers opened the doors and everyone disembarked. Their confinement and shared life of 6 minutes was over.

*“Over here Paul, the weather looks good so we’ll do Goat Mountain. There will be three of us. Hope you didn’t mind us coming ahead?”* The cyclists were gone and the Russians were indistinguishable from other tourists. The students were rushing down the walkway. The Mexican girl turned back and looked at Paul. She did not smile.

*“In a way we have each other’s photograph. We are equal. I think Anne Marie must have once looked like you.”* He decided he would go for the interview.

*“Come on Paul, Let’s storm Goat Mountain.”*

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