

A Recent Rare Discovery,
By: Chris Shaffer

Rivers Inlet, British Columbia

Every step was like walking on black ice. The rocks were slippery, polished with green algae and as difficult to navigate as wet tile in a bathroom or a drenched granite slab, almost as challenging as running on an ice skating rink.

The topography didn't lend much support. There was no trail whatsoever, no maps to follow, nor more than five consecutive yards of stable ground. Our route was comprised of those water polished boulders, decades of fallen leaves, trees blanketed with icy, oil-like moss and decomposed 10, 20 and 100-foot long fallen cedars, so slick that a body on a Slip 'N Slide had more control.

It was a path out of a fiction book, yet real. If you chose to leave the stream, this North American rainforest suffocated you with alders, cedars, ferns and accumulated fallen debris, so crammed together that a snake would render it difficult to slither through in many spots.

To me though, this is what I lived for, a true adventure in a place where few – if any – had traveled.

"I'd say maybe 50 people have ever been here, if that, and that's just a guess. I don't know of anyone who has been back this far," Jeff Lougheed, manager of Oak Bay Marine's King Salmon Lodge told me.

Lougheed and his five-year old chocolate lab Rocky had joined me on the excursion to find a spectacular waterfall that was rumored to be on this stretch of Shotbolt Creek. We began our hike at the remote, fly-in fishing lodge that spilled into Shotbolt Bay on the Central Coast of British Columbia.

Hiking wasn't scheduled on the trip, rather a brilliant idea, I thought. But with each step further into the woods, I asked myself, "What would my mom say if she knew I was doing this."

For me, it was dangerous like most of my wild adventures, yet different. The only thing stopping me and my \$3,000 Canon camera from plunging into the creek was grabbing onto a thorn bush, one so sharp it could cut through Calvin Klein jeans. The rocks and sobbing hillsides were joined by sharp, pointy, broken branches and limbs, many jagged like arrowheads and possibly reminders of what could happen to us if we weren't cautious. Our safety was in jeopardy.

It was similar to the time I walked chest high in muskeg on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska, crawled through the grizzly infested woods of the north Yukon

Territory and clambered through brambles and thorns, amidst the treacherous black, slippery bottom of the famous Blackwater River in Ireland.

I felt safe, though. I was actually working, product testing the new REI Taku waterproof jacket and pants, a Seal Line waterproof bag, Salomon XCR waterproof shoes and a Brunton ADC PRO weather station. Amazingly, each piece of gear held up and exceeded my expectations, especially the Taku suit, which continued to repel water even after being submerged for several minutes, half a dozen times.

As we pushed, slid and forged through four-foot deep holes in forty degree water we couldn't help but feel we were being watched. Grizzly and black bear owned this portion of the wilderness.

"Cougars, yah there's a lot of them here," Lougheed said. "There's probably one watching us right now."

But, we weren't just worried about getting attacked. This was a true test, one that would assess the most potent athletes. It wasn't about how great of shape you were in, rather your degree of patience, perseverance and mental toughness required to continue on a journey that may lead nowhere; one that was framed by pure, glacier water, ground that may have never felt a footstep and was covered in decades of leaves, pine needles, trees mobbed with gooey, sticky spider webs and insects I'd never seen. Stepping on bunches of the leaves awarded you the danger of falling through a three-foot hole and pinning your leg.

And, what would happen if one of us broke a bone or was swept downstream attempting to cross the swollen creek?

"I'm not sure. That's a good question. I'm sure that we could get someone on the radio on a boat though," said Lougheed, who had no radio. "A few guys from the lodge tried to get here last year, but one of them turned their ankle so they had to turn back. To be honest, I don't really know if there is a waterfall. It could just be a rumor. I think it's this way, but you are right, it could be that way."

Many would ask why? Why ravage through a place with no path, one that is sure to cut, scrape and likely to further injure you even when you are careful; one with no definitive destination, perhaps no waterfall. With sweat seeping through the wool on my beanie and frigid, fast flowing water creeping up the tips of my thighs, the answer was apparent.

This was life teaching me a lesson, one that could not be read in a book, learned in a classroom or articulated from the best teacher. Turning the next corner and seeing a 300-foot glamorous waterfall, a sense of special achievement draped over us. Our focus and determination branded us explorers and was proof that a focused human mind can accomplish anything it dreams. I like to look at this day as building a bridge that someone else can cross someday.

In a world where the last frontier is fading, would you have kept going? Experiences like this build character, reveal heart and drive more passion into your system. When was the last time you felt like a kid visiting a place that you believed no man had seen before? If you don't know the answer, it's been too long.

In an ever so competitive business world and an urban society where stress is mounting, the outdoors is a retreat, a pleaser and an escape that can flush evil, stress, sadness and congestion from your body. No matter what the magnitude, scale of difficulty or where you choose to explore, hike, kayak, walk or fish, challenge yourself to experience something special that you can pass around over the fire, in an email or through your voice on a cell phone. Our outdoor empire may be dwindling, fortunately it's not gone.