

Retreat: An Experiential Guide to the Cheakamus

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in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

Master of Landscape Architecture

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Acknowledgements

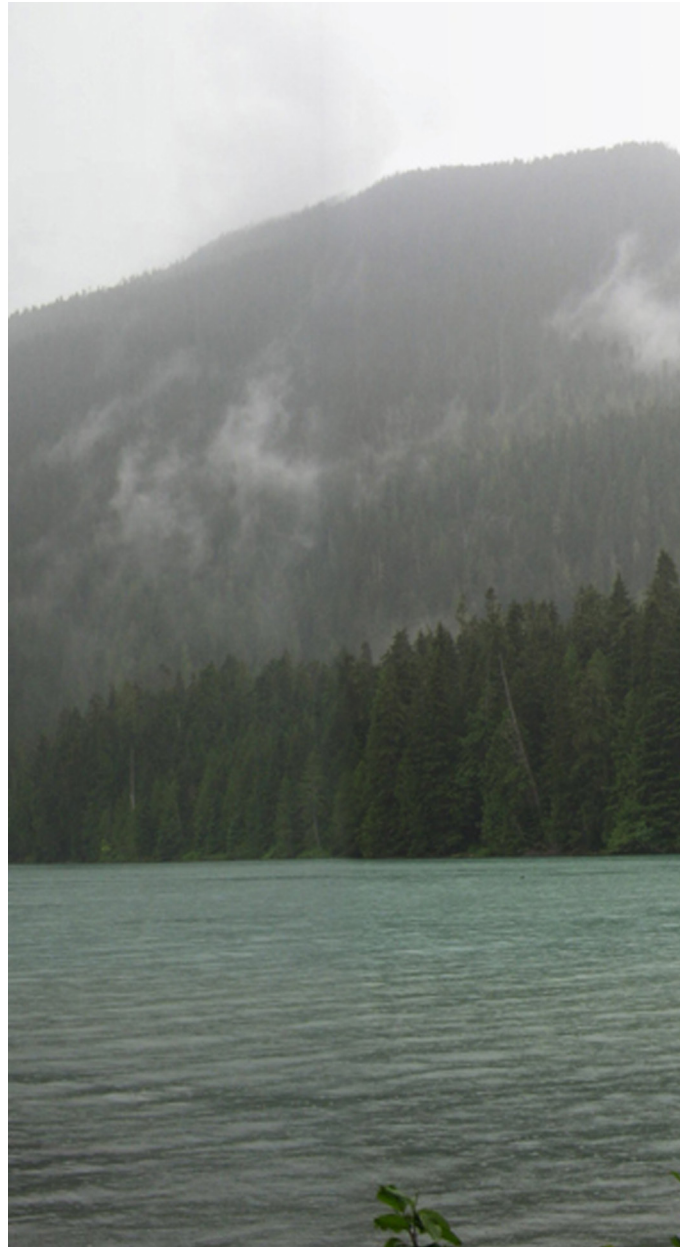
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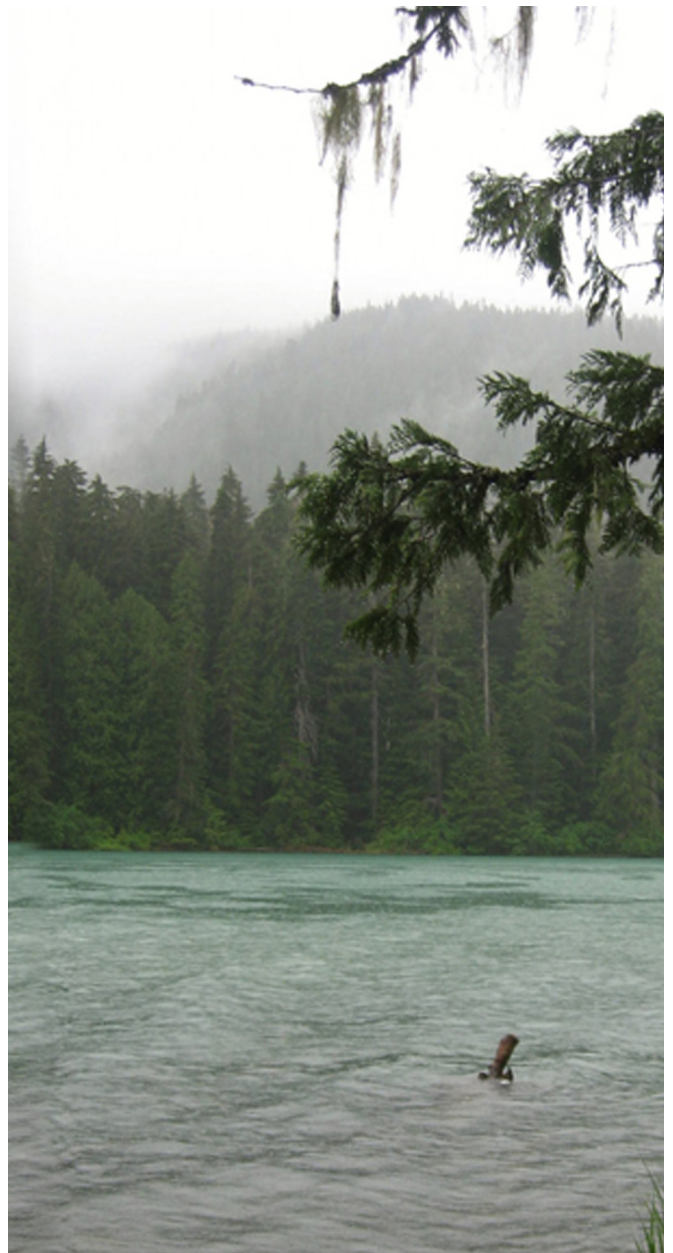
There is no occupation as sweet as scholarship; scholarship is the means of making known to us, while still is this world, the infinity of matter, the immense grandeur of Nature, the heavens, the lands and the seas. Scholarship has taught us piety, moderation, greatness of heart; it snatches our souls from darkness and shows them all things, the high and the low, the first, the last and everything in between; scholarship furnishes us with the means of living well and happily; it teaches us how to spend our lives without discontent and without vexation.

Cicero Tusculan Disputations



Cheakamus Lake, Garibaldi Provincial Park. B.C.







Near the confluence of the Squamish and Cheakamus Rivers, Squamish, B.C.

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Cheakamus Canyon, Whistler, B.C.

Abstract

The purpose of this practicum is to explore the Cheakamus River from its beginning at Outlier Peak to its arrival at Howe Sound. I explored it in terms of its history, both geological and cultural; its uses both past and present; and in terms of 'place'. I determined there had not been development in the area, due to geological instability and its unique location.

The manner in which I approached the work was that of exploration. I explored the place, its unique characteristics and its rarity. My exploration was through photography, writing and drawing. I explored the culture of the Cheakamus by looking at its role in the mythology of the First Nations People of the area. I explored its past and then looked towards the present at how the land surrounding the Cheakamus River has evolved and developed.

By looking at the notions of retreat, renewal, meditation and contemplation, I explored the Stimmung, *genus loci* and zen of this river system. Finally, I made connections between the river and the land, highlighting the uniqueness of place.



Headed towards Cheakamus Lake, Garibaldi Provincial Park, B.C.

Introduction

I was looking for an answer for what influenced my mind and my creativity. What is it that made me happy? My decision was to study my idea of retreat through a series of journeys. The purpose of these journeys was to pose the question, can Landscape Architecture design places that inspire contemplative thought?

And so it began and I went away.

I went to the ocean to see rocks worn flat by the wind. I went offshore fifty miles searching for salmon. I walked down streams hoping to find the answer. I hiked in for hours up a trail to a mountain plateau searching for an elusive trout. I searched for the answers in five lakes. I slept in log cabins, built fires and looked at the stars.

I went to art galleries, restaurants and parks. I went to the beach and to the forest. I studied yoga, Buddhism and meditation in an effort to quiet my thoughts. I thought about retreat.

I practiced the arts and studied artists. I went for walks to see life.

I made connections between nature and the restorative quality of nature, between aesthetics and the sublime. I tried to capture in words the feeling of mystery and sacredness that I found in the forest. I studied nature as a natural getaway. I examined the effect that sound, light and movement have on place.

I looked at people who had famously retreated into the woods: intellectuals, philosophers and artists.

I went into the woods to learn about retreat.



Looking Forward.

The Nature of Retreat

What is retreat and why do we do it? Can retreat only be successful when there is no work to do or, can a retreat be a way in which to learn? Does retreat happen when we are alone and quiet? Do I need to climb a mountain or sail a ship in order to retreat or can I simply ride a bike?

If I look at retreat in simple terms it could be a trip away to the lake. But can it be a part of the everyday? Can it be a walk through the forest or a walk on the beach? Can retreat be a barbeque in the backyard?

To understand retreat I separated the concept into three areas of study: the mind, the body and the soul's connection with retreat.

Retreat is about seeking balance in your life. It is more than just fresh air and exercise. It is the understanding that the natural beauty of the world is inspiring. It is the knowledge that the energy of a place is restorative.

When I retreat, I am looking for an escape from the hustle and bustle of the city, a break away from people and urban noise. I retreat to the oceans and the mountains for the feeling of energy, for a connection to the land. I go away to hear quiet, to feel solitude and the ground under my feet. It is the feeling of renewal that strengthens me in preparation for the challenges I face.

Historically, retreat was a search for wellness, whether it was found in healing waters or beautiful vistas. It was about restoring a balance, creating a connection with nature. The beauty of landscape is often a catalyst for retreat. Retreat happens in beautiful places. Does nature influence us to contemplate greater things? Is this overall engagement of the senses actually a realization that a place releases energy? Is it the energy or spirit of a place that is restorative? Is this why when a raindrop falls on your face you feel it so clearly? I concluded that direct experiences with nature are the reason why retreat is so engaging. When you retreat into nature you have a heightened awareness of the wind suddenly blowing through the trees, or the sound of thunder, or the appearance of a rainbow.



Kyuquot, Vancouver Island, B.C.

Retreat in History

For a thousand years people came to a remote spot in ancient Greece, the sanctuary of Epidauros, believing that the god Asclepius, would appear to them in dreams and heal them... One attraction of Epidauros must have been it's [sic] remoteness; patients seeking cures at the Epidaurian sanctuary in Greek or Roman times had to make a substantial effort to go there. Its setting was distinctly rural, a place where people could come directly into contact with untouched nature.

(Gesler, Healing places 21)


The author of Airs, Waters, and Places, a central volume among the Hippocratic writings, said that a pleasant climate, good water quality, and beautiful scenery were all conducive to good health (Burford 1969). Vitruvius (fl.first century B.C.) said that Asclepian sites should be healthy, near fresh springs of water, and away from pestilence... In other words, the Greeks were thinking a lot like the planners of European and American insane asylums in the nineteenth century who followed a romantic notion of the healing powers of nature experienced in rural settings.

(Gesler, Healing Places 23-24)

The belief in the therapeutic value of mineral waters, taken either internally or externally , is an essential part of the classical doctrine of nature: the restoration of the balance among the four humors by means of absorbing one of the elements.

(Jackson, Landscape in sight 136)

Private gardens appeared in China for the first time in the fifth century AD during the Northern Wei dynasty. Their creation grew from a striving for spiritual freedom, as opposed to the materialistic pleasure that motivated the building of imperial gardens and parks. Scholars of the past treasured moral and intellectual development over materialistic comfort and enjoyment. Reacting negatively to the social and political reality of their time, people became hermits in opposition to the status quo. Hermits of early days simply fled to the wilderness of mountainous regions and led primitive lives among birds and animals, often living in caves and hollowed-out tree-trunks. They received spiritual renewal from the nature that surrounded them and were comforted by its beauty and tranquillity. In this environment, many famous hermits throughout history made great contributions to art, literature, and to the development of literati gardens. (Wang, The Chinese garden 10)



It is here that I learned to fish for trout.

It is a magical place, a pine forest.

What did this place teach me, what did I learn?

I learned I love wilderness, that I love to feel I am alone
in the woods.

I learned I love to be somewhere where no one
has been, somewhere where no one may have been for
months or years.

That I like to catch fish.

That I like to be in the company of interesting people.

That I like to be told stories.

That I like to be in the company of other dreamers.

I learned I love to look at the stars, talk about life
and sleep in log cabins.

Elbow Lake, Kamloops, B.C.

It is here that I learned to fish for trout.

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Hollywood Cabin, Elbow Lake Lodge, Kamloops, B.C.

Questions on Retreat

What is the relationship between retreat and contemplation?

Is a retreat somewhere you go to become contemplative?

Do we have to go away to retreat?

Can Landscape Architecture design sites that are able to facilitate a contemplative response?

What does landscape have to do with contemplation?

How does nature influence us? Is a natural environment a motivator for retreat?



Looking up in the trees, Cheakamus Canyon, Whistler, B.C.

Historically, contemplation has accompanied withdrawal from the web of normal life, whether to institutions such as monasteries, or to landscapes perceptually reduced to aid the process. Monasteries and convents represent places of retreat. One withdraws from society for a religious or personal ideal; it demands some sacrifice, for example, the relinquishing of worldly possessions, sexual appetite, perhaps even the gift of speech. But through this denial one gains a stronger sense of who one is and why one is present.

(Treib, Attending 20)



Cheakamus Lake, Garibaldi Provincial Park, B.C.

The nature of contemplation

What does a search for contemplation entail? How does one go about being contemplative? Is a contemplative state something you choose? Or is it something that comes when you least expect it? Does contemplation come from your mind, your body or your soul? I looked for an answer about life. How do you bring yourself to a moment where you are free from the problems of the everyday?

What is contemplation? Is contemplation focus, is it meditation? Is it the act of realization of where you are and why? Is contemplation simply an attempt to clear your mind and focus?

Contemplation is a way of connecting to the world at a deeper level and examining your place within it. This feeling of awareness happens only when your mind allows it to. In order to facilitate this exchange there is a need to take the step of being alone, or to surround yourself with solitude.



Red Cedar, Whistler, B.C.

In her essay, "Landscapes of Contemplation", Landscape Architect Rebecca Krinke defines contemplative experience as:

...awareness - whether fleeting or habitual - of that most foundational, most original depth of being ... It can and does "happen" to people without any preparation and while they are engaged in pursuits that are not concerned with seeking it.

(Krinke, Contemplative landscapes, restorative landscapes 4)

It is in this contemplative state that we can understand our mind's ability to focus, but getting to this point has its own problems. The act of being contemplative may happen for each of us in different ways. How is it that we let go? In what ways do we quiet our minds? Some meditate, others play golf, garden and go fishing. For some it may be walking the dog, jogging or swimming. Contemplative thought is for each of us in our search for the sudden feeling of mystery or wonder. There is no specific way to induce contemplative thought. It is something you must allow yourself to be open to.

Although we may concentrate on our breathing or external devices such as mandalas, it appears somewhat as a philosophical contradiction to think that we can concentrate on contemplation, since most of the enlightened ones tell us that much of the process depends on our letting go.

(Treib, Attending 17)

The idea that you may be able to design a contemplative place or facilitate contemplation is a difficult one to reconcile. In one way it makes sense that if you give someone a setting in which to contemplate, that it would induce this focus. However, it seems that a contemplative setting is more about your own mind-set than it is about a 'required' place. The place could be an over-look, a spot at the beach, or the base of a tree. Contemplation is more about you, than where you are.



Moss, Cheakamus Canyon, Whistler, B.C.



Looking at Cheakamus Lake, Garibaldi Provincial Park, B.C.



The river is quiet, it is winter. Cheakamus Canyon, Whistler, B.C.

In my search for answers, I read Alan Watts "Tao: The Watercourse Way ". He wrote that you cannot force, or try to induce a contemplative state. Instead, he suggested that contemplation is a natural thing and will happen only when you are ready for it. Trying to become contemplative, designing for it, telling someone to "think deep thoughts" is not the way.

We do not hear nature boasting about being nature, nor water holding a conference on the technique of flowing. So much rhetoric would be wasted on those who have no use for it. The man of Tao lives in the Tao, like a fish in water. If we try to teach the fish that water is physically compounded of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, the fish will laugh its head off .

(Watts, Tao: The Watercourse Way xiii)

However, there is the hope that Landscape Architecture can create spaces for people where they can go to become contemplative. People need places in their lives where they may go, to find a moment in which they are able to let go of their thoughts and clear their minds.

Is there a way in which we can design landscapes for the purpose of contemplation?
Can contemplation be facilitated?



Pathway along the river at Chekamus Canyon, Whistler, B.C.

Why do we search it out?

The journey of my work started with an idea:

Life may have to show itself to us in some of its authentically tragic colors before we can begin to grow properly visually responsive to its subtler offerings.... we may need to have made an indelible mark on our lives, to have married the wrong person, pursued an unfulfilling career into middle age or lost a loved one before architecture can begin to have any perceptible impact on us, for when we speak of being "moved" by a building, we allude to a bitter-sweet feeling of contrast between the noble qualities written into a structure and the sadder wider reality within which we know them to exist. A lump rises in our throat at the sight of beauty from an implicit knowledge that the happiness hints at the exception.

(de Botton, The Architecture of Happiness 22)



Forest Appreciation, Cheakamus Lake, Garibaldi Provincial Park, B.C.

What was my process: how did I retreat?

In a search to understand the nature of contemplation I found simple moments of clarity where my mind was clear and I was able to focus on my environment, the weather, the sounds of nature and animals. Where I was most successful at finding these moments was in the wilderness far away from the sounds of traffic; where the sounds I listened to were from birds and the rustle of leaves.

What is it about being in nature that inspires contemplation? Is it the closeness to the ground or the feeling of your entire body being engaged by the wind, scents and temperature? Is it the overwhelming scale of mountains and the ocean that engages our thoughts? People seek out nature in their lives in an effort to achieve balance. It may be a break at lunch or a walk at night but we do it to feel connected to the world.

Although many of us live in close proximity to wilderness we may live our lives never going there or experiencing it? Someone who is free may be the person who is educated, or the one who seeks nature. While we see ourselves in tune with nature, it may actually be that it is in these natural settings that we are most able to focus.

At times of questioning in my life, my thoughts have occurred most clearly when I have been outside. It is in silence that we are able to hear the intensity of the world. The world is found in the wind blowing softly late at night and the glow in the sky when everyone is asleep. These secrets of nature; Nature that is accessible and nature that is not.

I looked for beauty in nature, this inexplicable luxury that could be found there. It was in these sacred and spiritual places where I realized that I was not alone. I realized that there were many like me who took solace in the woods.



Devil's Club, Garibaldi Provincial Park, British Columbia.

How were these ideas engaged?

I went to find my own way of retreat, of contemplation. It was in my search that I understood that most people resist change. It is this resistance that causes imbalance in our lives.

Although there is comfort in familiarity we cannot allow it to control us. Instead there must be a way to separate oneself from the stress of every day life. The answer may come through a simplification of our lives and needs.

What is the nature of contemplation? What is it that we need? We need prolonged silence, a focus on something other than buying and selling. Our world is loud and fast, we take for granted all the things that are available. We have become satisfied with the quick and fast and we become have become complacent. We stay in the valley; we do not climb to the hills.

Do we need: cellular phones, newspapers and head phones to go outside? In order to retreat we should abandon these accessories. We must listen and be part of the experience. Using your senses allows you to take clues from nature.

The nature we seek out in our lives is in an attempt to achieve balance. A break at lunch or a walk at night may be our effort to feel connected to the world.



A creek running through the forest.

Is nature a source of contemplation?

Is a river running, or the sun shining, or the moon rising the answer? Is the beauty of flowers in their complexity? Do we hike in mountains for the reason that we can relinquish control? Do we hike to become closer to god? Do we ski to feel the wind in our hair? Do we fish to conquer? Do we seek nature as a way of replenishing what we have lost?

When I began to search out contemplation I was looking to focus, to find peace and importance in my life. I was looking to find beauty in nature and understand how being surrounded by it affects us.

'What is beauty in landscape?' There is a presupposition that it must be the same as beauty in sculpture or in dancing, otherwise we should not describe it by the same word. But as soon as we re-phrase the question as 'What is the source of that pleasure which we derive from the contemplation of landscapes?' we are perfectly free to postulate that it may be different from source of pleasure to be derived from any other experience. It raises other philosophical questions, of course, such as 'What is pleasure?' but it does not impose the same limitations as what which for centuries so shackled the aestheticians as to render them impotent to give a generally acceptable answer to the simple question 'What do we enjoy about landscape and why?'

(Appleton, The Experience of Landscape 14-15)

What draws us outside? Is it the silence, is it a break from routine?

Contemplation is a hard thing to achieve or explain. My point of view is that it is a feeling of freedom, of contentment, of being in the moment.

Is contemplation the ability to clear your mind to think about something, or nothing? Is it the ability to focus on the weather, or sounds, or animals? Where can this occur most successfully? I believe it is in nature, far away from the sound of traffic, where the sounds are birds and the rustle of leaves.



Cheakamus River flowing downstream from Cheakamus Lake.

What I was trying to understand ?

My personal experiences shaped the way that I came to understand retreat. I examined the connections that I made as I have explored these ideas. In this practicum I wanted to write about this feeling and capture it in images and stories.

Retreat is about learning: learning about yourself, learning about your environment; learning to still your mind while moving your body, allowing thoughts to flow; turning off the world and at the same time turning the world on; engaging the senses, feeling the wind, smelling the ground.

Retreat is enriching and strengthening. It is intellectually and physically stimulating. It is the kind of thing you do for yourself, like meditation, or yoga, or a simple walk in a park.

I wanted to understand the spirit, the feeling I felt at the Cheakamus. My exploration began with a curiosity about the river and then became a search to make connections. I looked for connections between what you see and what you feel. I set out to explore the Cheakamus River from its beginning at the Outlier Peak to its arrival at the Howe Sound. I began by documenting the Cheakamus Canyon. I was overwhelmed by the sound of the river in the canyon.

I returned season upon season, listening to the water and drawing its flow, in an effort to capture it's essence. What I learned about the canyon began to connect me to the place. The rocks are different there, the plants were different, the ground was covered with moss offering a place to sit.

How can you explain the feeling of walking in the forest?



You can hear the sound of the river along the path.

What did I find when I went to the woods?

I found a place, a magical place where I felt connected to the world.
Where did it lead me?
It led me to the ocean, to the lake, to the mountains.
I hiked, I fished, I saw life.

My retreats happened in Kyuquot, Elbow Lake, Squamish, Whistler and Garibaldi Provincial Park. My retreats awakened my curiosity about life, they made me feel alive. I questioned why it is that we live in the city and then retreat to the woods?

What is it about the city that draws us here? Is it the sense of belonging that comes from being surrounded by others? In the city there are places you go to, things you do to make you feel a part of the world. In the city we have communal meeting places, shopping malls, art galleries and libraries. What people seek from the city is a connection to a feeling of being a part of something larger.

Both city and civilization originate in the idea of community, and the city still holds the promise of the classical world as the place where people become human.

(Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* 83)

There is the idea that the city is cultured and cosmopolitan; that in the city we are learning, exchanging ideas, working together and creating community. However, there is the thought that the city cannot fulfill our need for places of contemplation and this is why we retreat to natural places. However, in order to find contentment in the city, there must be places to which we retreat.



Fall at Chekamus Canyon, the water is low.

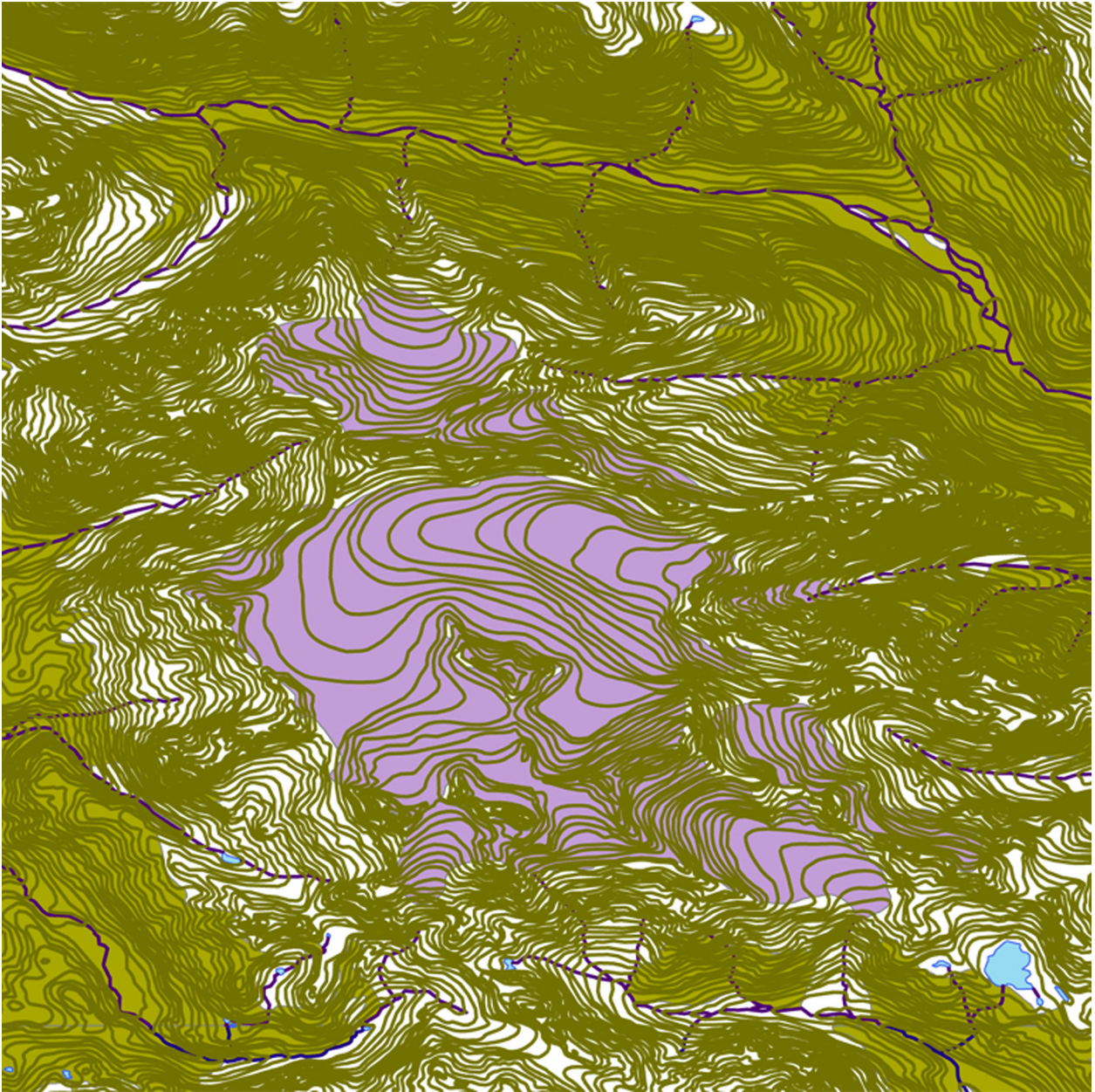
In the city there are places where we go that become our retreats.

The locations in a city that attract us by a special intangible significance possess the common guise of the sacred: a hill from whose crown we can survey the surrounding area with a sense of visual power; a grove, clearing, glen or cove in a park, whose intimacy breathes a quiet air of magic.

(Berleant, The Aesthetics of Environment 76)

You may find your retreat while sitting in a park, or walking along a beach. It may be a picnic spot that you go to with your family, someplace where you can hear the wind. Maybe is it a quiet spot where you take your lunch.

In the city a sense of solitude may only be a feeling. Being surrounded by people can often bring a sense of calm and safety, being alone may be uncomfortable to some. There is a challenge to finding balance in your life while living in the city. We are overwhelmed by the day-to-day: the business, the shopping and the traffic. The rushing around exhausts us. The energy of the world, the spirit in place fills this void. Our life today is one of intensity, to find balance you must match this intensity with intent.



Cheakamus River, Garibaldi Provincial Park, B.C.

Do we seek nature as a way of replenishing what we have lost?

Historians have often noted that the Western world in the late eighteenth century acquired a taste for the natural in all its major art forms... They were falling in love with the natural in their art precisely because they were losing touch with the nature in their own lives.

(de Botton, The Architecture of Happiness 159)

We go to the park for lunch and to picnic and once a year we take a two-week vacation. When is it that we relax? Where can we go to when we are in our busy mode? Why is it that we leave where we are for vacations halfway around the world?

I began to think about the idea of a retreat as a place where one goes to be contemplative. What kind of place would it be? Does it need to be nearby? Could it be a lunch in the park, a place to watch a sunset from, or a chair in a garden?

Do we need to go away to find what we search for? Do we need a change of scenery, or an event? What I saw in the idea of retreat was a search for peace and renewal. It was a search to quiet your mind: not just being silent, but being quiet. I had the sense that it required the type of quiet that would come from not being plugged in, from being away from the buzz of electricity. It would lead one away from work, the internet, radio, horns and voices.

What was needed was a change of scenery. Maybe this is what we require to discover the sensitivities in ourselves, to feel things deeply. Perhaps my retreat was an effort to find beauty in my life, and to find a deeper connection to the world we live in.

We drive on freeways, shop at malls, or work in office buildings. But how often do we hike in mountains, swim in the ocean or pick berries? Retreat becomes a way of restoring this human need to connect with nature, one attempt to reconcile the work, the mortgage, the rat race for a two-week vacation or weekend away.



Walking into the woods.

Aspects of Retreat

Wilderness is an example of why sublime influences retreat. The inaccessibility, the overwhelming violence of nature - it scares you into silence. The unknown, the mystery around the corner, it forces you to stop and pause. Not knowing what is around the corner is like life, the way that you must have faith in the future. I need silence to think, to calm my mind. In an effort to listen, I am consumed by the sounds of nature. Wild places can scare you; the city is safe. In the forest there is the knowledge that you are alone with your thoughts. You also realize that what you see is the same thing someone once saw thousands of years ago. Knowing that the trees that stand one hundred feet tall are one of the youngest things around you somehow changes you.

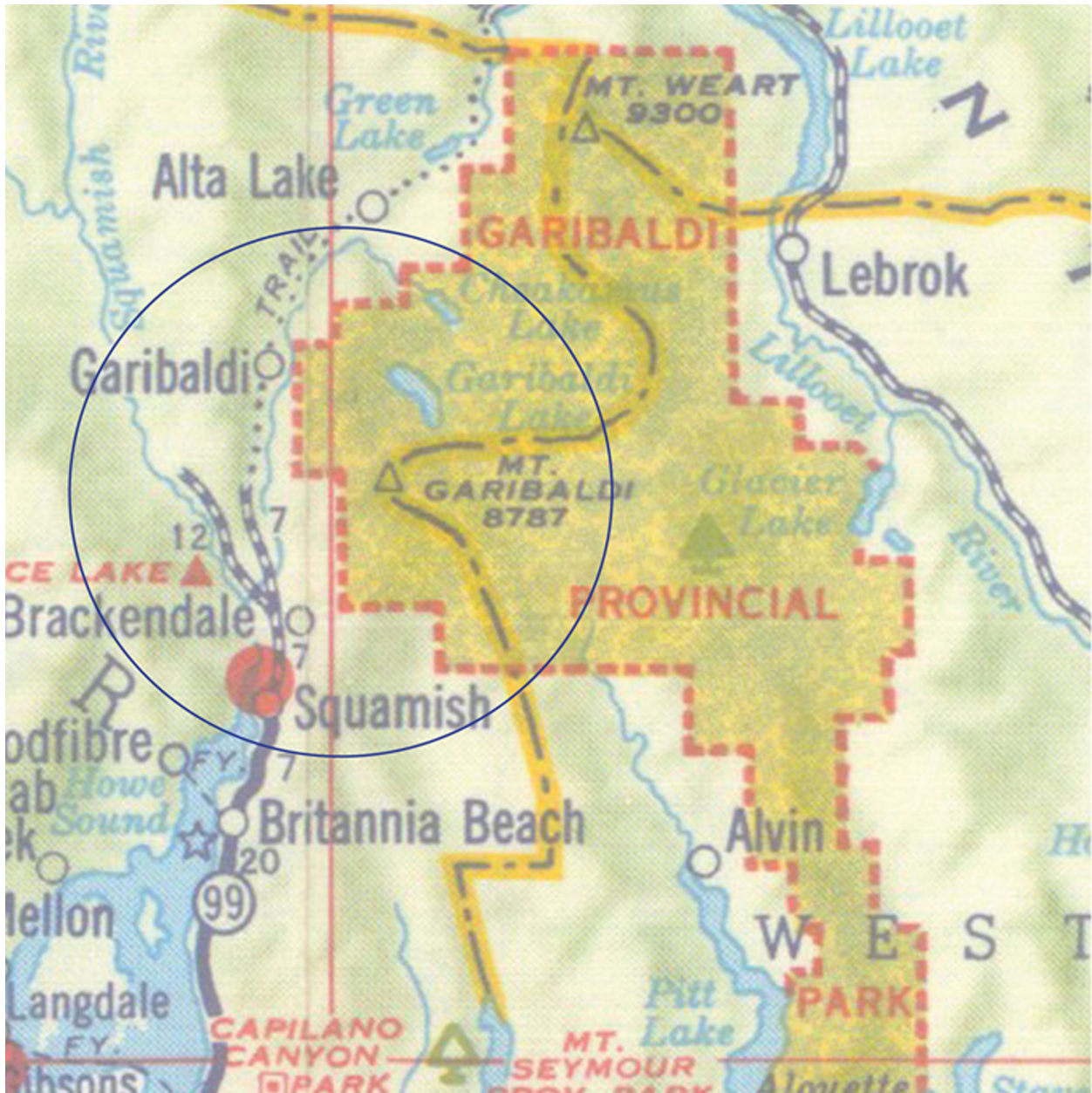
The paradigm of the cathedral suggests, further that in its fullest development the sense of place is a sense of the sacred- sacred to oneself, sacred to the community, sacred in the higher order of things. To the extent that it seems grotesquely incongruous to speak of urban places as sacred, to that degree has the city failed to become precious to its residents.

(Berleant, The Aesthetics of Environment 75)

In the city everything is man-made and under control. There are fire lanes, access for emergency services, and emergency areas. But in the wilderness there are no guarantees: no safety net, no second chances. Being this close to the edge makes us focus on the here and now.

When you are floating in water, or drinking water from a spring, it creates a balance. Negative energy is replaced by positive energy. This is why Buddha says to take the middle road.

Fatalistic energy is replaced by the renewal when you emerge unscathed from the journey. This feeling of rejuvenation may be why people ride motorcycles, race boats and cars. Why do we strap on skis and race down the side of a mountain? Is it because this scares us just enough?



Where I found Inspiration.

Does Buddhism have an answer?

I looked at the ways that I experienced retreat, and the connection between mind, body, soul. I examined how I retreat through the study of Buddhism, gardening and fishing. My own art could be likened to a series of hikes on existing trails at different times. I considered what I have observed, what I have searched for and what I have found. At its core, what I searched for was a feeling of connection to the world. I was seeking to discover what inspired me.

Learning about Zen Buddhism during this process has inspired my creativity and the way I have looked at writing about the Cheakamus River.

Over the past fifty years, people have turned increasingly to other ways of thinking that offer a more conciliatory understanding of the human place in the natural world. Among them are Taoism and its vision of living in a harmony with nature, the Native American tradition of a continuity between one's body and the land, and the Aboriginal belief that everything in nature is equally sacred.

(Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environments* 34)

I was drawn to the idea of living in harmony with nature, of nature being restorative. I chose my site because of my attraction of the forest: the beauty of the sublime and the spirit of the place. When I was at Chekamus Lake I was sheltered by the forest, surrounded by the scents and sounds of nature, and exposed to an arresting view.

Not only are we unable to sense absolute limits in nature, we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves in order to measure and judge it with complete objectivity. Nature exceeds the human mind.

(Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* 169)

Why are we more readily able to become contemplative in natural settings like Cheakamus Lake? It appears that it is due to the characteristics of the place, such as its natural beauty and quiet.



Cheakamus Lake in the rain.

Retreat is about renewal, inspiration and taking time to experience nature. The spirit of the Cheakamus River is in the way it connects you to the movement of water and the experience of being in the woods.

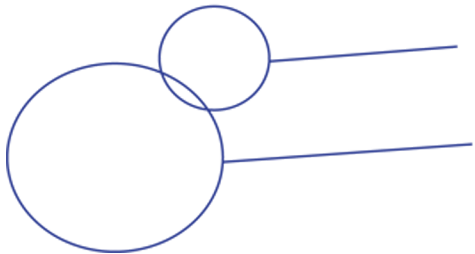
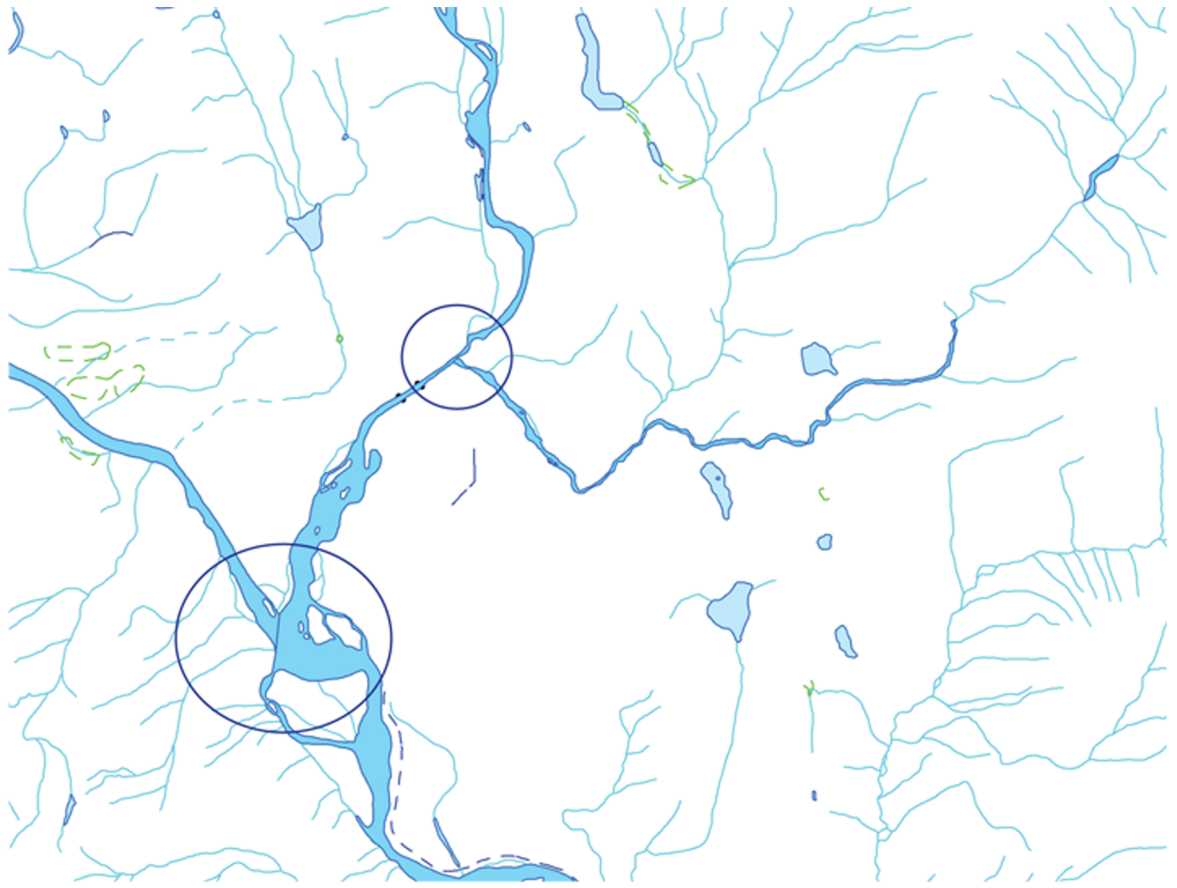
The design is inspired by the *genus loci* of Cheakamus Lake in Garibaldi Provincial Park, British Columbia. Forms in the design allude to the passive versus dominant sound of water, the direct experience of water and wind, and the natural flow of both.

I initially headed to Whistler for the lifestyle it afforded. It was my retreat. It does not have the romance and history of the Rockies. It has a younger feeling that is the Coastal Mountain Range. On the mountain there is a feeling of awe, standing there surrounded by clouds, it is hard not to scream while you rush down the hill. I began to branch out and explore the nature of the place, the spirit, the draw of it. I explored further and further into the woods. There I found a peace, a quieting of the body and mind. I felt a spirit in the mountains.

Forests must be encountered...in the forest, surrounded by trees, we alone are the loci of aesthetic life. The challenge is to encounter non aesthetic trees, mountains, rivers and awaken to the experience of beauty...aesthetic appreciation of nature, at the level of forests and landscapes, requires embodied participation, immersion and struggle. A forest is entered, not viewed... You do not really engage a forest until you are well within it. The forest attacks all our senses- sight, hearing, smell, feeling, even taste. Visual experience is critical. But no forest is adequately experienced without the odor of the pines or of the wild roses.

(Rolston, The Aesthetic Experience of Forests 188- 189)

I went to the Cheakamus River and I explored it. I followed the flow of the river from the mountain to the sea.



Confluence of the Cheakamus and Cheekeye Rivers, Squamish , B.C.

Confluence of the Cheakamus and Squamish Rivers , Squamish , B.C.

What are the stories of the land ?

The land was that of the Lil'wat and Squamish nations. It stood unchanged for millions of years,

In 1792, when Captain George Vancouver of the English fleet anchored in Howe Sound, there were sixteen or more Squamish First Nation villages located along the Squamish River, all within 40 km of its mouth at the head of the sound. Most of these villages maintained summer camps on Howe Sound and the Burrard Inlet. Members of Squamish First Nation once travelled barefoot year-round unless they were journeying north along the Pemberton Trail in winter, when they wore moccasins and sometimes snowshoes. The Pemberton Trail was an active trading route to Lil'wat First Nation territory, part of a vast network of trails that linked the coast with villages in the interior. Travelers often brought news of sudden changes that had occurred in the course of creeks and rivers such as the Mamquam, Squamish, Cheakamus, and Cheekeye. Still young in geological terms, these rivers can easily be rerouted by strong floods. Hudson's Bay Company explorers who walked the Pemberton Trail in 1857 were the first Europeans to see the havoc wreaked by the great landslide that had occurred two years earlier at Daisy Lake. The rumble felt at the time in nearby villages must have reinforced the Squamish taboo against exploring too high in the mountains for the fear of incurring the wrath of the mighty Thunderbird.

(Christie, The Whistler Book 8)

The Mamquam, Squamish, Cheakamus and Cheekeye rivers were important rivers for the both the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations. The rivers were used as a source of drinking water, as a passageway into the mountains and as a source of salmon. Stories of the region are about stories of a great flood, stories of mythical creatures that cause the rumbling of the mountains and creation stories of how the people of these parts came to be. Nature and the passage of time were interwoven in their society. Time was measured not by days, but by moon phases. The Lil'wat year started in November. In this calendar we see the importance of salmon to the community. The Cheakamus River was one of the most productive salmon streams, it also acted as a trading route for the Squamish and Lil'wat nation.



Confluence of Cheakamus and Squamish Rivers.

As settlement along the coast expanded, there was interest in developing new routes to the Interior and the gold fields in Lillooet. Around 1870, the Pemberton trail was developed linking the North shore of Vancouver with Lillooet. At Squamish the trail linked up with the Cheakamus River until it reached what is now known as Whistler. By 1914 the Pacific Great Eastern Railway had been built.

In the thirty years between 1881 and 1911, the non-native population of British Columbia swelled from 23,798 to 372,306.

(Budd, Voices of British Columbia 21)

PHAIR : There were really no whites here [in Lillooet] until the gold rush of 1858. Well, then the Indians, they were living just as they had lived for twenty thousand years.

(Budd, Voices of British Columbia 83)

When the railway was built in 1914 it opened up the area to visitors. What they came for was the beauty of the area and to hike in the mountains.

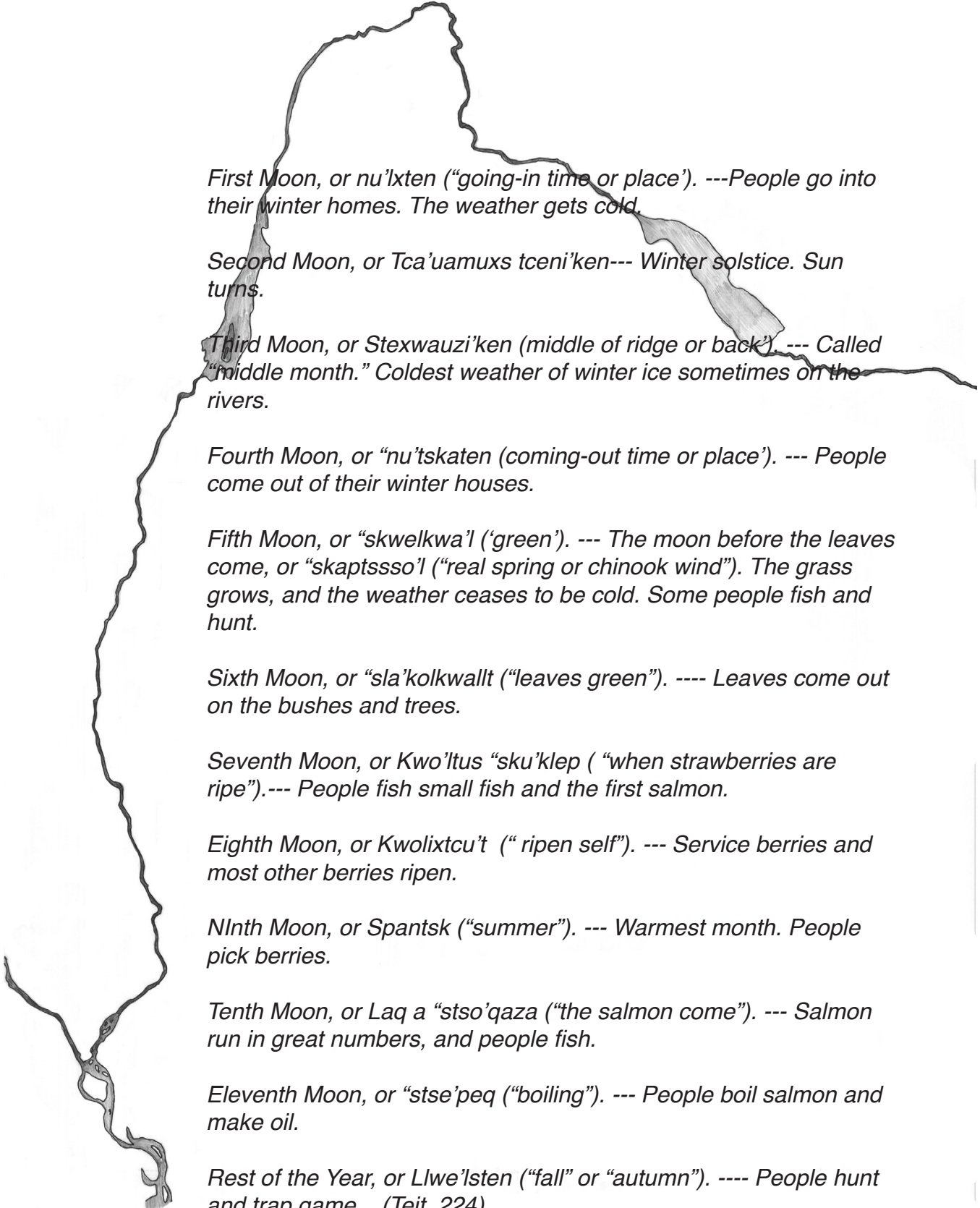
In the 1920s members of the Vancouver Natural History Society took boats from Vancouver's Harbour to the Squamish waterfront and hired wagons to take them to Mount Garibaldi to hike these mountains. An area of high elevation peaks from Squamish to Pemberton was set aside at this time. (Whistler book 27) The area was called Garibaldi Park Reserve, which was designated as a 195,000 hectare provincial park in 1927. Today many areas along the west side of the park continue to be enjoyed by the public, while vast areas of the central and eastern portions of the park retain the ecological integrity of true wilderness.

("Garibaldi Park." gov.bc.ca, 26 October 2009. Web. 26 Oct.2009.)

This "true wilderness" remains untouched today. The use of the land in its natural state is an important aspect of the idea of retreat. The area surrounding the Cheakamus has traditionally been used as a place of retreat and the proximity to salmon bearing streams has played a part in this.

It was fishing that drew the first tourists to Whistler. They were headed to Rainbow Lodge on Alta Lake to cast for trout with guides Alex and Myrtle Philip. By the early 1920s, Rainbow Lodge was the most popular summer destination west of the Rocky Mountains.

("Rainbow Lodge."whistlerblackcomb.com, Web 25 November. 2009.)



First Moon, or nu'lxten ("going-in time or place"). ---People go into their winter homes. The weather gets cold.

Second Moon, or Tca'uamuxs tzeni'ken--- Winter solstice. Sun turns.

Third Moon, or Stexwauzi'ken (middle of ridge or back). --- Called "middle month." Coldest weather of winter ice sometimes on the rivers.

Fourth Moon, or "nu'tskaten (coming-out time or place'). --- People come out of their winter houses.

Fifth Moon, or "skwelkwa'l ('green'). --- The moon before the leaves come, or "skaptssso'l ("real spring or chinook wind"). The grass grows, and the weather ceases to be cold. Some people fish and hunt.

Sixth Moon, or "sla'kolkwallt ("leaves green"). ---- Leaves come out on the bushes and trees.

Seventh Moon, or Kwo'ltus "sku'klep ("when strawberries are ripe").--- People fish small fish and the first salmon.

Eighth Moon, or Kwolixtcu't (" ripen self"). --- Service berries and most other berries ripen.

Ninth Moon, or Spantsk ("summer"). --- Warmest month. People pick berries.

Tenth Moon, or Laq a "stso'qaza ("the salmon come"). --- Salmon run in great numbers, and people fish.

Eleventh Moon, or "stse'peq ("boiling"). --- People boil salmon and make oil.

Rest of the Year, or Llwe'lstén ("fall" or "autumn"). ---- People hunt and trap game. (Teit 224)

What are the stories about it's bio-physical geography?

As visitors came to Whistler, they came to 'get away' to be in nature - to see the beauty of the place and to experience it. At this time Whistler was not only known for its excellent fishing, but for mountain climbing and scenery. In 1929 Fredrick H. Varley of the 'Group of Seven' painted a series of paintings in Garibaldi Park. The paintings highlight the beauty of the nature in the area. Cheakamus Canyon is the subject of one of the paintings. In it, Varley captures the movement of the water as it flows through the canyon. By 1964 a road was built to Whistler linking North Vancouver to Pemberton. While the modern 'Sea to Sky Highway' takes a slightly different path than it did in 1964, what is similar is the fact that like the Pemberton trail of 1860 it still follows the path of the Cheakamus River.

Whistler and the surrounding areas are located in the Coast Mountain complex of Western British Columbia. The Coast Mountain complex is one of the youngest mountain systems of North America, being of middle and late Mesozoic origin.

The Resort Municipality of Whistler, (R.M.O.W), 125 km north of Vancouver, and approximately 50 km north of Squamish, straddles the catchment basin divide of the Cheakamus and Green Rivers. The Cheakamus and Green River catchment basins consist of steep, glaciated peaks, and are V-shaped valleys characteristic of Coastal Mountains in which the weathering of the extensive volcanic intrusions, and often phosphorus rich parent material, produces higher than normal ambient concentrations of phosphorus into the aquatic environment.





(Chantler, Whistler and Water 50)

Hydraulically, the area is characterized by mountain rivers that carry large amounts of sediment. The sediment originates from landslide and debris flow material, by glacial activity in the headwaters, and by erosion of glacial tills and other material adjacent to the banks of the tributary creeks

(Chantler, Whistler and Water 51)

Garibaldi Provincial Park lies within the Garibaldi Volcanic Belt which is the northern extension of the Cascade Volcanic Belt. The Garibaldi Belt includes nearby Mt. Garibaldi along with Mt. Cayley and Mt. Meagher to the north. Since the last ice age the Squamish region has experienced a significant amount of volcanic activity resulting in such geological features as Mt. Garibaldi and the Ring Creek Lava flow.



-  — Confluence of Cheakamus and Squamish River
-  — Cheakamus Canyon
-  — Mouth of Squamish River
-  — Cheakamus Lake

It is the geography of the area that makes it special. There is a feeling here that facilitates retreat. It is evident in the planning of Whistler as a resort community. People come from all around the world to visit this place. Summer visitors hike in Garibaldi Provincial Park to visit untouched wilderness and to see nature. Wildflowers bloom in the early spring in the alpine meadows. Fly-fishing happens along the Cheakamus River at all times of the year. People come here to get away, to retreat.

People who participated in the Outdoor Challenge Program were exposed to an extended nature experience. The duration in a predominately natural environment was far greater than what most modern humans experience most of the time... The many aspects of simplicity - unity of purpose, lessening of distraction , emphasis on the basis of survival - have an interesting effect on people. Many participants experienced a sense of "wholeness" or "oneness."

(Kaplan, The Experience of Nature 145)

The park is situated in the Coastal Western Hemlock bio-geo-climatic zone. The principal forest cover consists of Douglas Fir and Lodgepole Pine. The moist low lying alluvial sites support Western Hemlock, Red Cedar, Big Leaf Maple and Alder. The upper lava plateau has very shallow soils supporting primarily immature Lodgepole Pine and a moss lichen ground cover.

The climate in the park is a modified coastal climate with comparatively cool winters and warm summers. Climate is influenced by the park's proximity to ocean inlets and mountain glaciers. The summer day temperature range for the months May through to September is 16°C - 23°C, with the maximum temperatures occurring in July. The winter day temperature range for the months December through to April is -1°C - 11°C, with the minimum temperatures occurring in January. Rainfall is highest during the fall of the year; the summer months are comparatively dry and sunny. Snow conditions are generally dry and the average depth is +/-1 meter from December through to March

(Outdoor Recreation Maps of B.C., 1981).

We come to know an environment by engaging the landscape. We do this by experiencing its processes, learning about its historical meaning and its geographical characteristics, and appreciating its values.

(Berleant, Aesthetics and Environments 57)

It is not the forest, or the river, or the people that make this place special. It is the sum of all its parts, the feeling of being in this place the energy of the land.



Site scaled at 1-500, with 50 meter contour intervals.

As you drive to Whistler you pass changes in the rock. These changes are distinct but because of the treacherous nature of the drive you cannot stop to look. When I went to the Cheakamus and hiked through Garibaldi Provincial Park I noticed other distinct rock formations in Cheakamus Canyon, the Barrier and Black Tusk. However no one could explain how these things were formed. What I learned was amazing.

The community and resort of Whistler has developed within a wide mountain valley in the Coast Mountain Range. Within this area there are five lakes and more than a dozen mountain streams. The topography of the steep valley sides and the wide valley bottom results in the creation of extensive alluvial fan and floodplain areas where the mountain streams enter the valley and flow along the valley bottom. Runoff leaves Whistler via Green River to the north and Cheakamus River to the south.

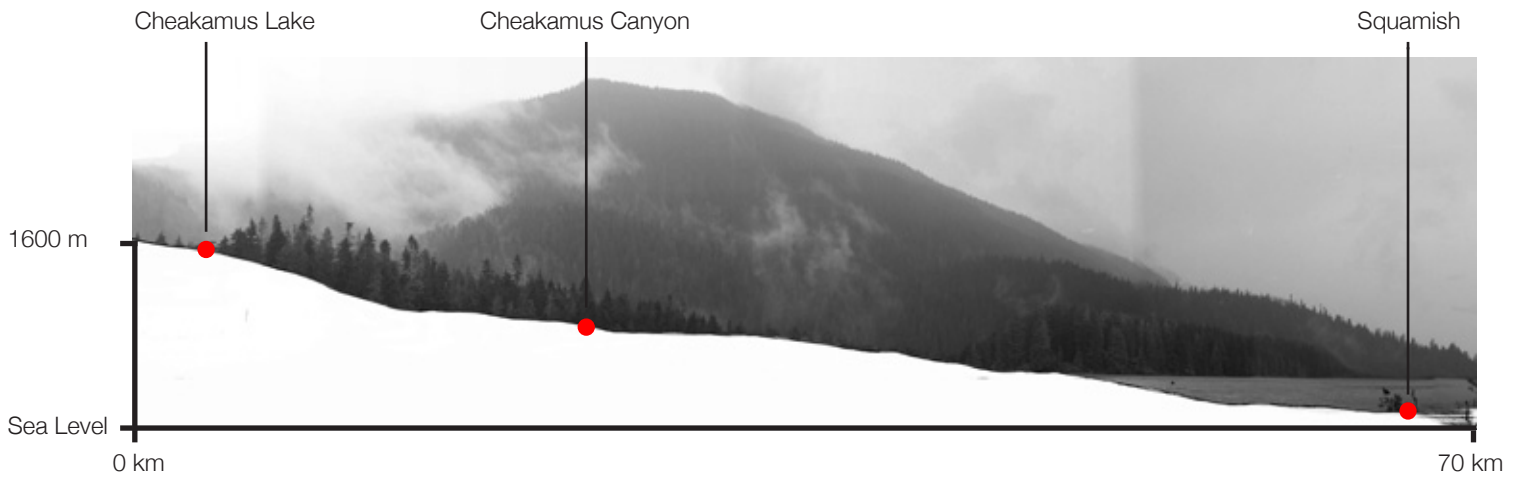
(Chantler, Whistler and Water 130)

Volcanic activity characterizes the area south of Whistler, and basalt outcrops are visible from Highway 99. An immense cliff known as the Barrier, about 18km southwest of Whistler, was formed by volcanic magma solidifying against the side of a glacier that filled the valley during the late stages of the last ice age.

One of the most fascinating geological features of the area is a 500m high face, known as the "barrier", which marks the front of the lava flow which cooled in contact with a late Pleistocene glacier. This was hundreds of metres high, filled the whole valley, and had sufficient size and weight to stop the lava flow. When the glaciers receded at the end of the ice age, a very much over steepened, unstable cliff was left.

(Chantler, Whistler and Water 131)

Understanding the science behind the place animates the myths and stories of the Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations. When the glaciers began to melt and solidified lava flows fell onto themselves the effects would have been felt for miles. When I began to research the events that took place in the area I was inspired to learn more.



Garibaldi Provincial Park is located in an area of southwestern British Columbia which is a region of extensive Neogene - Quaternary volcanism. The waxing and waning of continental scale ice sheets, as well as the presence of alpine glaciers, during Quaternary time has led to many interactions between volcanoes and ice. These interactions explain numerous geomorphological features of southwestern British Columbia's Volcanic Belt. (GVB)

(Smellie, Volcanic ice interaction on earth and mars 195)

Driving through the area, you would never know that at one time this was an area of volcanic activity. Walking along the canyon there is a feeling of being somewhere special but it is only through learning about the geography of Garibaldi Provincial Park that I came to understand the feelings I felt when I was there. Listening to the sound of water rushing through the canyon you can almost feel the water flowing down, carving out the canyon.

These volcanic ice interactions created the unique characteristics of this area. These interactions are so rare that the Subglacial flows of the Cheakamus River Valley, on the western margin of the Garibaldi volcanic field, contains the only known example of this feature.

(Smellie, Volcanic Ice Interactions on Earth and Mars, 201-202)

Thousands of years ago, a volcano erupted on top of a glacier. After the eruption the lava solidified, and then, one day, the glacier underneath the now solid lava began to thaw. Water from the glacier ran down through the mountains carving a pathway. The mountains began to change as the ice melted. The lava flows that were once supported by a sheet of ice fell onto themselves.

Imagine the sounds of rumbling from the mountains. Imagine the volume of water flowing. Imagine the devastation as the place changed once again, bringing forth life.

The following story is from the Squamish First Nation. It tells of the events that led to the beginning of the Squamish people.



War Canoe headed to the Salish Sea

THE FLOOD SQUAMISH

No one paid much attention at first to the swelling of creeks and rivers. But when new rivers suddenly flowed where none had been before, people began to wonder. Scouts that had been sent out to other parts of the country reported that the lakes were rising and the earth had opened in countless places to spew out water. Councils were held and tribes consulted their wise men. Some of these spoke in their dreams in which they had seen a great big sea cover all land and drown most people. Only those who had built canoes and filled them with provisions had managed to survive. Most people laughed at their wise men and said that their dreams had only been nightmares. A few saw them as providence and immediately began to gather food and carve canoes. In the meantime rivers spilled over their banks and filled the lower parts of the land between them. People moved to higher ground, but the water followed. Again they gathered their belongings and moved into the hills. But now the sky darkened with rain clouds and water poured from them as if the heavens had unleashed waterfalls. The water rose so quickly that many people drowned before they could find safety. Others were swept to their doom by mudslides or were carried away by the turbulent water. People prayed that their lives would be spared, but their voices could not rise above the din of the torrent, and the spirit of the water refused to listen. Night came and the rain continued to fall while the sea kept rising. Four times the sun rose and set again without its light being able to penetrate the falling rain. On the fifth day the rains stopped, the clouds dispersed and once again the sun shone. It illuminated a gray sea that seemed endless. All land had disappeared. Only the tips of the highest mountains were still visible as specks of rocks. The people who had outlasted the deluge sat huddled in their drifting canoes. They prayed and offered their last food to the Spirit of Life. Appeased by their unbroken faith, he sent gentle winds to push each canoe towards a mountain top. There the survivors anchored their craft and watched as the water began to recede. The land that emerged was covered with mud and there was no sign of life anywhere. But the sun worked swiftly, drying up the land and coaxing new growth of vegetation. From each group of people who had landed, a new tribe originated. In time they repopulated the earth.

(Hirshnall, North American Indian Myths and Original Paintings 38)



Contemplation.

These stories and the science of this region tells the tale of the spirit of this place. The highest mountain peaks were only visited by the most spiritual people of the tribe. Others would only hike in the mountains at certain times of the year to pick berries and hunt for game. The mountains were inhabited by animals, trees, rocks and plants. Chekamus Lake was a site where the Squamish people would have made camp for a few weeks every fall to pick berries and hunt game. For these traditions to continue the Squamish people need unimpeded access to land in a natural state.

What is left of the old growth, the sacred sites, sacred mountains, places that people use in traditional ways? ... We need places set aside around sites for spiritual practices where we can practice in the current day - places where we can go to be alone.

(Joseph, Xay Temixw Land Use Plan 14)

In retreat we are looking to find these places. They may not be in the mountains or at the sea. They are places in which we can go to be silent.



Fishermans Beach, Squamish

What are the stories of the people?

When I began writing about the experience of the Cheakamus River, I felt what was important was the story of this place and the stories of the people of this place and what they used the forest for. The Cheakamus River runs for seventy kilometers. It runs through traditional land of both the Lil'wat and Squamish Nations whose peoples have a strong tie to the water and land.

The Lil'wat were traditionally 'logistical collectors' (binford 1980) They had semi-sedentary villages where large amounts of food were stored and they maintained a variety of specialized base camps from which salmon, deer or plants were procured and processed for storage. Both the Squamish and Lil' wat people would have relied heavily on salmon. In times of poor salmon runs, people would have gone into the mountains to hunt and harvest roots and berries. In mid-May small family groups began making short trips (i.e., several days to one to two weeks) trips into the mountains".

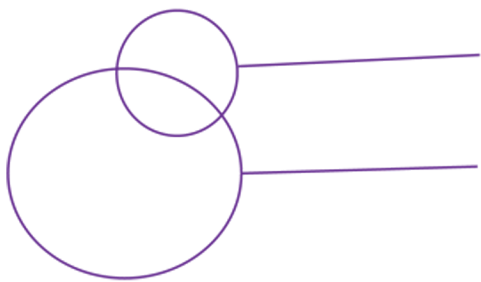
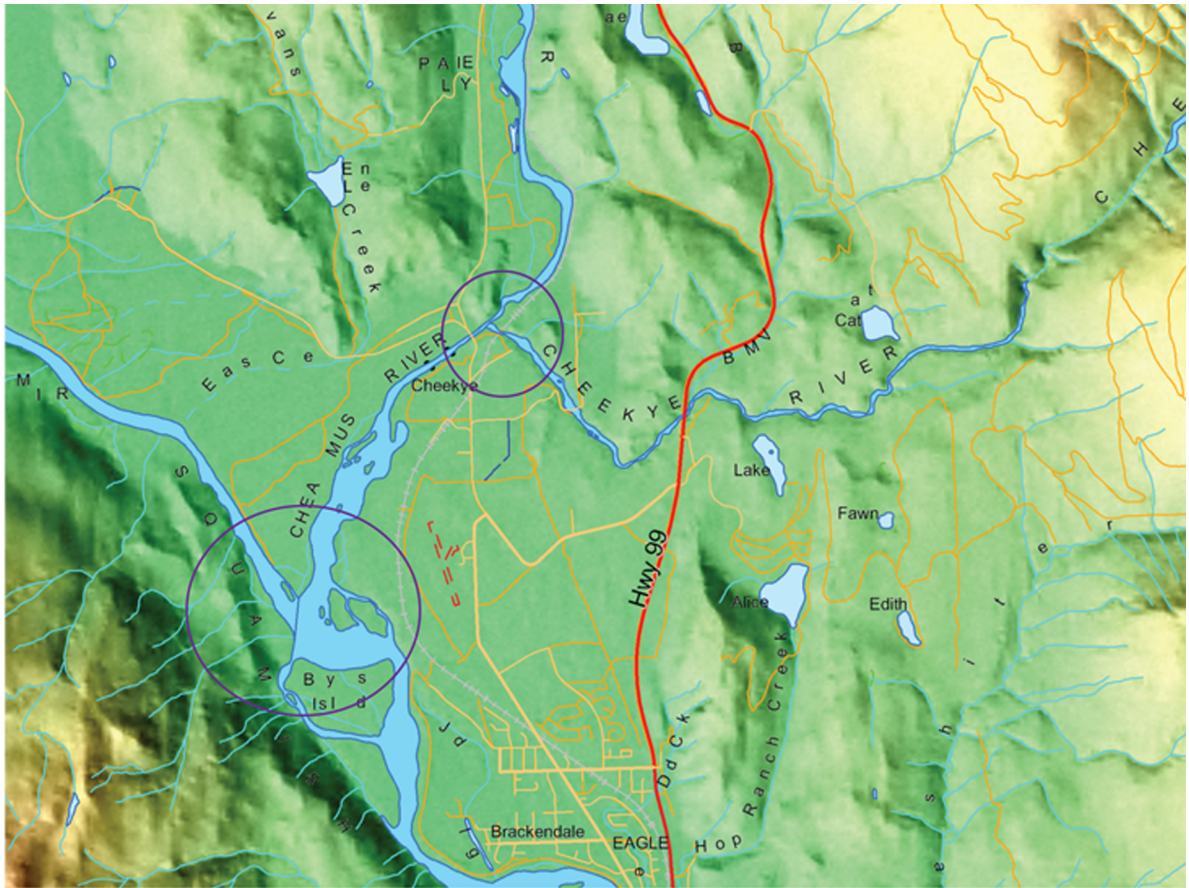
(Hayden, A Complex Culture of the British Columbia Plateau 100)

These trips would have been taken between May and October. The Lil' wat calendar is lunar. Months of the year are organized around moon phases. The calendar shows the importance placed on the fishing season. Salmon is still today the lifeblood of the Pacific Northwest. The Cheakamus River is a breeding ground for

...“five species of Pacific salmon that are known to the Sta'atl'imx : sockeye (oncorhynchus nerka), spring (O. tshawytscha), coho (O. kisutch), humpback (o.gorbuscha) and steelhead (o.mykiss)". Speakers of the Sta'atl'imx language also distinguish specific runs of spring and sockeye salmon. When the sagebrush buttercup (Ranunculus glaberrimus) blooms in Lillooet around April, it is an indication that the first run of spring salmon, called skwexem is ascending the river.

(Hayden, A Complex Culture of the British Columbia Plateau 271)

Although salmon would have been an important staple in the diet of the Squamish and Lil'wat people it would have been supplemented with a variety of food plants found in the forest.



Confluence of Cheakamus and Cheekeye Rivers at Squamish, B.C

Confluence of Cheakamus and Squamish Rivers at Squamish, B.C

The Cheakamus River is a pathway not only for the people but also for the salmon. For the Squamish and Lil'wat people the Cheakamus is an important part of a much larger watershed. The life of a salmon plays an important role in the culture of all British Columbia First Nations. The salmon is as much a part of the forest as are the people and trees.

Knowing about the place and its peoples and their stories is a part of retreat. Retreat is about feeling the energy of a place. Through retreat one can gain an awareness that comes from being somewhere and being a part of the place. It is not being in nature but being a part of nature.

By participating actively in environment, we confront and respond to its various configurations. We can grasp its masses with our bodies, understand the contours of the terrain through our feet, sense its perfume or pollution with our noses and its movement, sun or shadow with our skin. Environment is no region separate from us. It is not only the very condition of our being but a continuous part of that being. Appreciating environment requires a sensitivity to these undulating forces and currents of the world. An alert awareness, sensory acuteness, and understanding of the formative influences of the past that embraces present processes - all are part of that appreciation.

(Berleant, Aesthetics of Environment 131)

This is the mind, body and soul connection to nature; the feeling of walking through the woods, your feet on the ground, raindrops falling through the trees and feeling the rain on your face. This is why in order to retreat at the Cheakamus River or anywhere you need to be immersed in the experience.



Plan of proposed site at 1-500.

How is the nature of retreat restorative?

Much research has been done looking at the restorative benefits of nature. What was of interest to me was to integrate this into the design of my site. Why is nature restorative? How can these restorative qualities be integrated in design?

Stephen Kaplan looks at the restorative qualities of nature as an experience that leads to recovery from the fatigue of directed attention in his paper entitled "The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward An Integrative Framework".

The restoration of effectiveness is at the mercy of recovery from directed attention fatigue. Sleep provides one approach to recovery. While useful it is insufficient... In order to rest directed attention, it is necessary to find some other basis for maintaining one's focus.

(Kaplan, The Restorative Benefits of Nature 172)

A place may offer a restorative setting if it is fascinating. This fascination captures our imagination. Fascination could be clouds floating by, birds singing or waves breaking on a shore.

Soft Fascination - characteristic of certain natural settings - has a special advantage in terms of providing an opportunity for reflection, which can further enhance the benefits of recovering from directed attention fatigue. We have used the concept of 'Restorative experiences' or 'Restorative environments' to refer to such opportunities for reducing the fatigue of directed attention.

(Kaplan The restorative benefits of nature 172)

The opportunity for reflection that Kaplan speaks of is part of what retreat is about. The site at Cheakamus Lake offers us a place where we are sheltered, where we are able to commune with nature.

The components of restorative environments include this idea of being away, however Kaplan states that the 'sense of being away does not require that the setting be distant...however a nearby, accessible natural environment cannot provide the context for all these goals and purposes. Yet even such a setting is likely to be supportive of the inclinations of those who seek a respite there.'

(Kaplan 174)

The idea of accessible nature is an important distinction in retreat. In the city there is a need for people to have places where you can take a break. Parks, gardens, a bench under a tree; places where you are able to sit and think.



At the lake.

Being outside, getting fresh air, walking, these are all things we do in an effort to be restore our energies. In the city there is a need for people to have places where you can take a break. Parks, gardens, a bench under a tree; places where you are able to sit and think.

Environmental psychologist Roger. S Ulrich designed several different types of studies that demonstrated that contact with nature produced faster and greater recovery from stress as shown by lower blood pressure, less muscle tension, reduction in anger and an increased feeling of well-being.

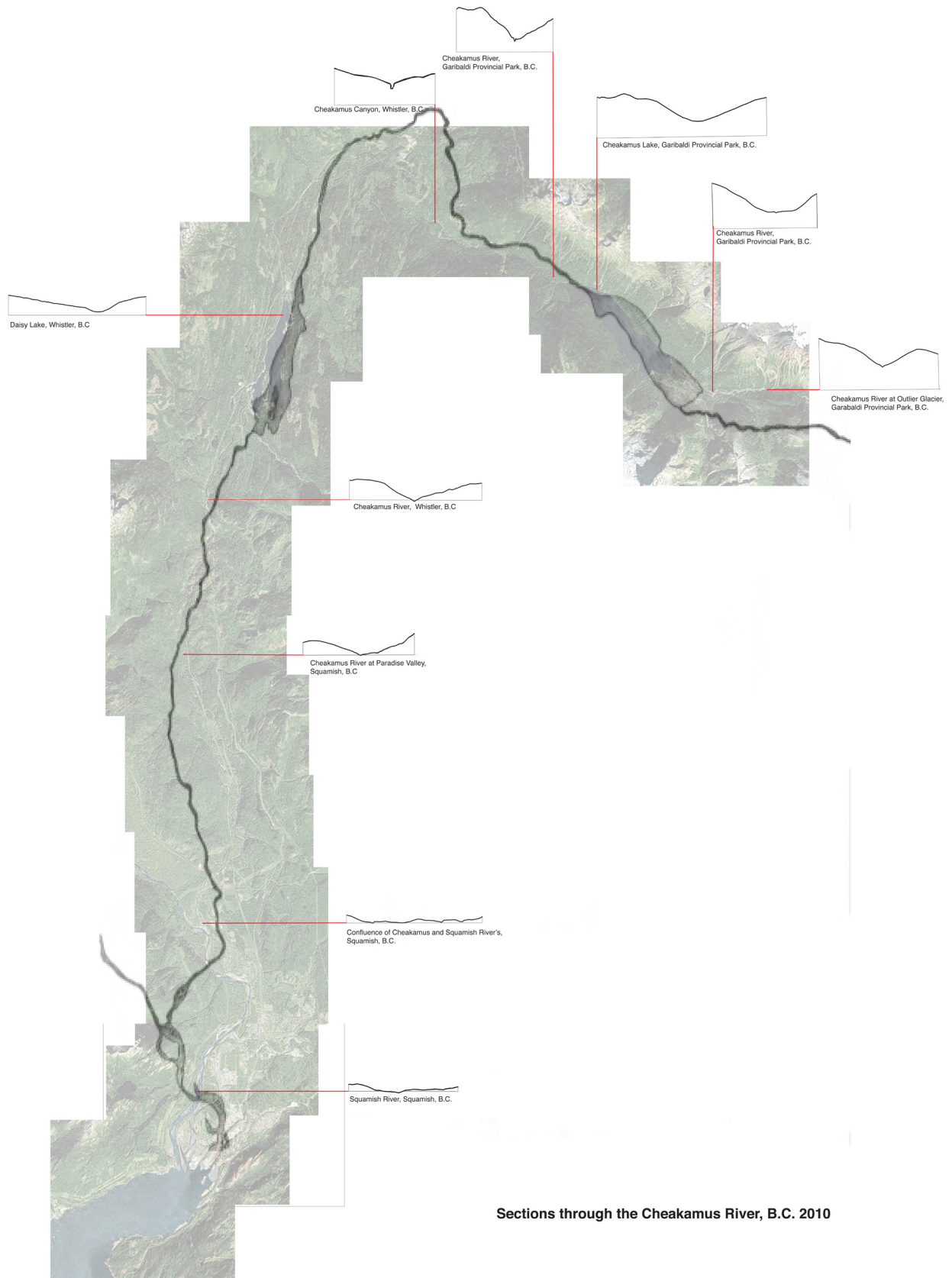
(Krinke, Contemplative landscapes, restorative landscapes 5)

So where do we go when we retreat? Like many before us we go to the woods. It is in the wilderness that we find true beauty. A place that is untouched by man.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived (Thoreau, Walden 143)

There is the feeling of entering the woods, it is all encompassing. The forest edge is a threshold into the unknown.

Aesthetic appreciation of nature , at the level of forests and landscapes, requires embodied participation, immersion, and struggle. A forest is entered, not viewed... The forest attacks all our senses- sight, hearing , smell , feeling even taste. Visual experience is critical. But no forest is adequately experienced without the odor of the pines or of the wild roses; and one catches how much animal senses of smell can exceed our own. (Rolston, The Aesthetic Experience of Forests 189)



Sections through the Cheakamus River, B.C. 2010

How do you explain the draw of the forest? What is our need to explore somewhere some may find uncomfortable or scary. Some may liken entering the forest to entering a cathedral. Being somewhere where you are small, where your eye is drawn upwards, where you are surrounded by nature. In the past forests were inhabited by mythical creatures. Now science has provided us with the ability to distinguish myth from reality.

In 1555 the great naturalist Conrad Gesner walked straight up the notorious Mons Pilatus overlooking Lucerne, expressly to lay to rest the absurd legend of the malevolent ghost, said to be responsible for violent disturbance of the weather... Gesner had already extolled mountain climbing as essential not only for the pursuit of botany but "for the delight of the mind and the exercise of the body"
(Schama, Landscape and Memory 430)

Why do we search out beauty? Why do we search out this physical, emotional connection with nature? Is it because inwardly we believe we are expected to think these places are beautiful? That being morally good actually involves the idea that good people feel a connection with beauty and nature and to be good, you must also feel this.

Kant... His idea of the sublime captures one aspect of the aesthetic experience of nature- the capacity of the natural world to act on so monumental a scale as to exceed our powers of framing and control, and to produce in their place a sense of overwhelming magnitude and awe.

(Berleant ,The Aesthetics of Environment 167)

History has many examples of people retreating to natural, healthy places. They have gone in search of fresh water and healing springs. Some have climbed mountains to breathe fresh air. Others have retreated to meditate and contemplate. Shamans would retreat into the mountains to restore their energy and awaken their consciousness. Now there is also the popularity of yoga retreats and fishing lodges removed from the outside world.



At Fishermans beach, Squamish, British Columbia.

Kant, the towering mountain, if sublime, is at the same time good because it provides us with a recognition that we can enjoy, in its presence, the moral dignity of a being who appreciates the eclipsing of mortal powers of comprehension and rises above this defeat. (Moore, Natural Beauty 185)

Retreat is being in the woods, hearing the wind, feeling the spirit of place. This understanding is that we search for. For some there is comfort in being surrounded by trees, plants and animals.

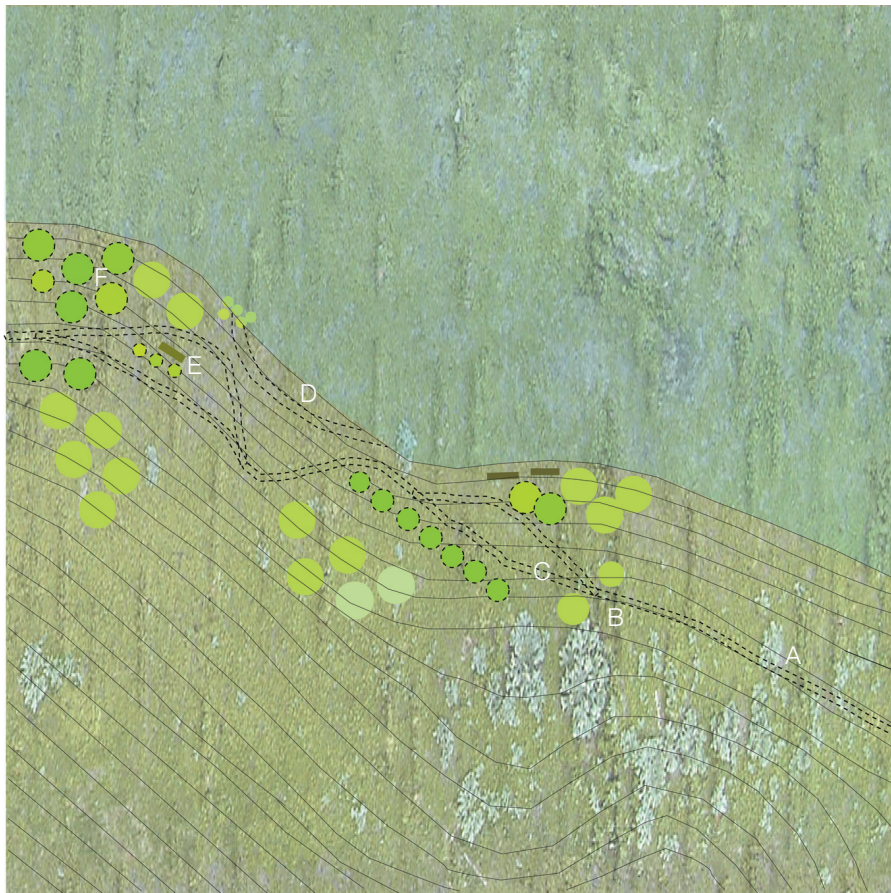
Mountaintop experiences, the wind in the pines, a howling storm, a quiet snowfall in wintry woods, solitude in a grove of towering spruce, an over flight of honking geese- these generate "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused... a motion and spirit that impels and rolls through all things. Therefore I am still a lover of the meadows and the woods, and mountains" (Wordsworth, 194)

The trees and plants are only one part of the forest. We see the sky when looking upwards through the canopy of evergreens. We hear the river. Branches breaking signal the curiosity of animals nearby. There is never a moment when the forest is the same. It ebbs and flows like a tide.

Places are empowered by the lived bodies that occupy them; these bodies animate places, breathe new life into them by endowing them with directionality, level and distance - all of which serve as essential anchoring points in the remembering of place.

(Casey, Remembering VI)

It is being in the woods. Hearing the wind. Feeling the spirit of place. Being surrounded by trees, plants and animals. It is being alone.



A walk through retreat at Cheakamus Lake

Retreat at the Cheakamus

When I set out to design an intervention for Cheakamus Lake I took into consideration the unique characteristics of the site. I felt that any intervention should focus on the experiential qualities of the place. It became about the experience of the place: the Cheakamus Lake, the forest surrounding it and the pathway in.

Why go away? Why look around the corner? Because this is what you will find, hidden in the forest a garden for you.

Can you design a site that inspires retreat? Can you inspire contemplation through design? Can you lead a person to retreat?

I tried to “distill” the experience of the Cheakamus through the arts. Through a series of explorations I looked at the accessibility of retreat in the everyday, and the inaccessibility of retreat in the wilderness. I looked at why retreat is important and how design can inspire a mind/body/soul connection with place.

What emerged from my process was the realization that there was not one thing alone that inspired retreat, rather that it was the spirit of a place that was inspirational. It was the journey, the passageway, the energy of the place.



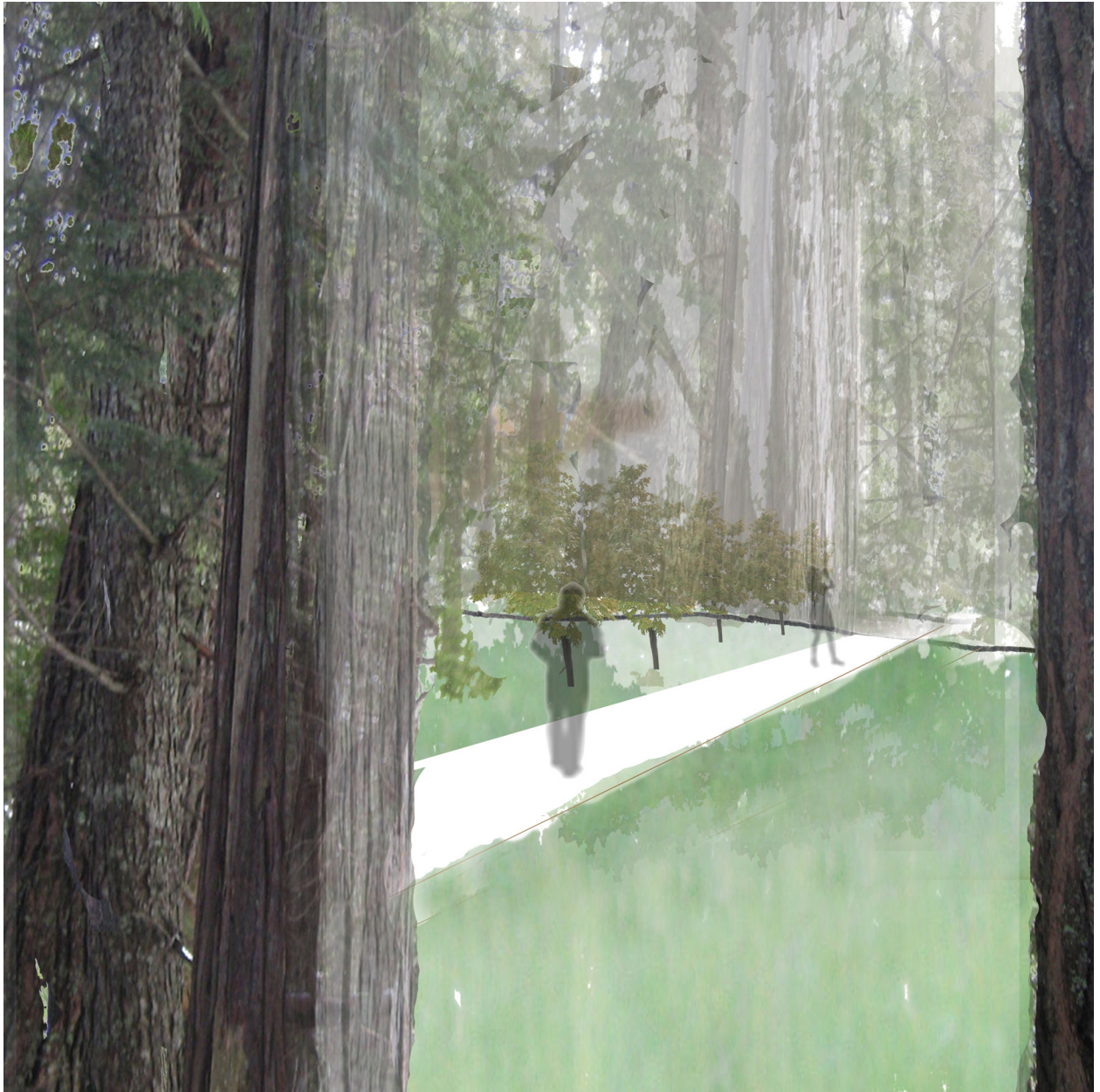
At the trailhead

The site Cheakamus Lake influences the design through its spirit and energy. The flow of the water became a basis for form. Direct experience with sound and water create the balance.

The concept of *Retreat : An experiential guide to the Cheakamus* is a design that inspires a connection to place through a series of passages in the forest. These passages focus views creating a multitude of situations in which a person may retreat physically and mentally. I was inspired by Japanese stroll gardens, Voie Suisse, design without the obvious presence of the designer and the use of indigenous materials.

The connections are made in a series of ways, regionally connecting the length of the river, the passage through three places along the river, finally culminating with a walk through the woods with the destination being Cheakamus Lake.

*How do I convince you this place is special? How do I share my secrets.
How could you ever know why I come here or what has brought me here so many
times before. Was it the beauty or was it simply the quiet. Was it the trees, or the
forest?*

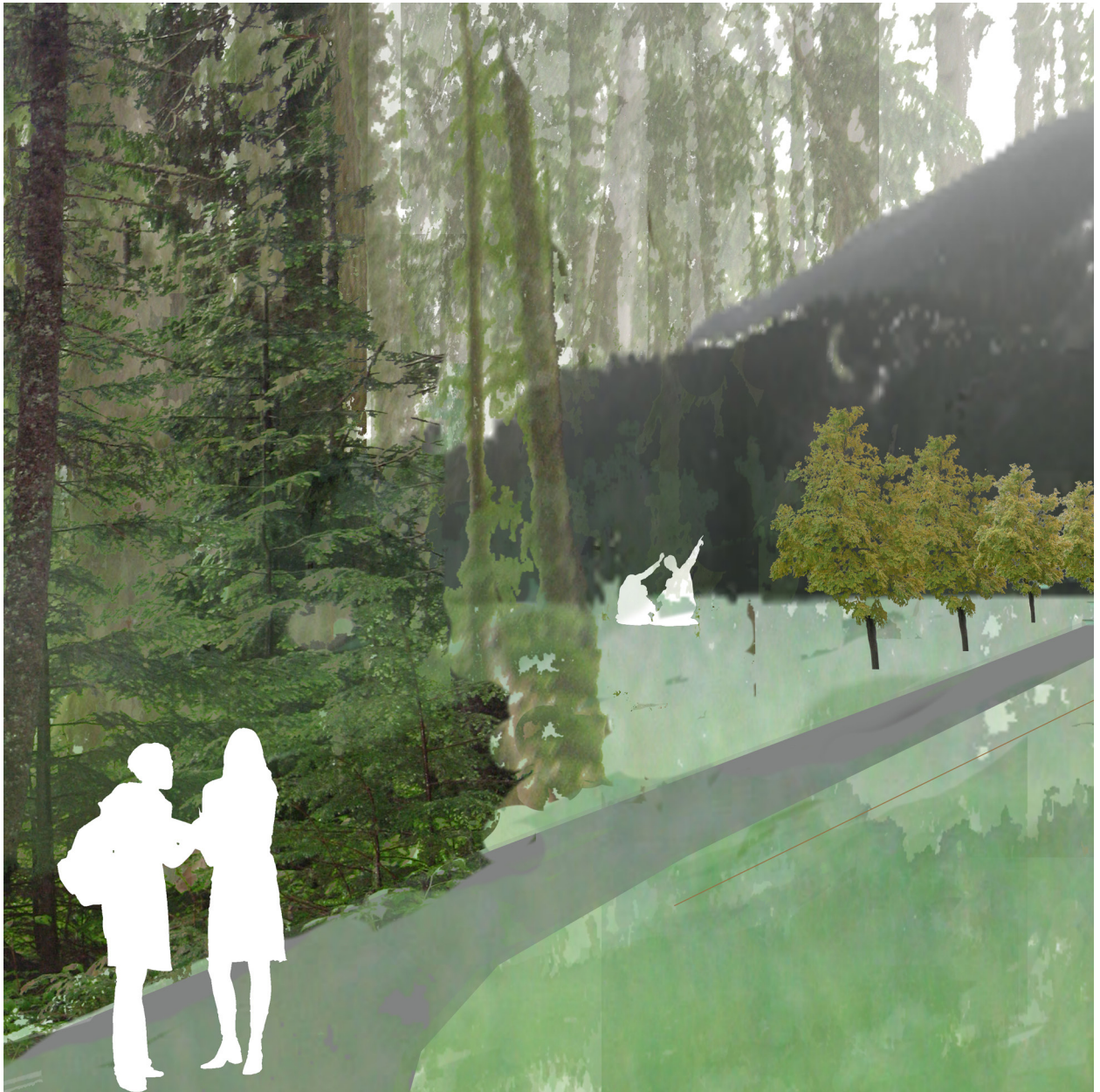


Pathway looking east.

As we reach the trailhead there is a series of massive rocks piled up creating stepping-stones. I climb to the top. Far below in the valley I see the Cheakamus river. The valley below is inaccessible. The river looks small but the size of the logs that have been carried down convince us of its power. It is fall now, the level of the river is low. If you come in the spring you will see its fury and its force. This time, the trip is about the hike. It is about the journey up into the mountains. It is about visiting where the river begins, and seeing where it comes from.

We come across a slide. It happened recently the plants cannot lie. As we pass through the area the forest begins to change. The undergrowth is sparse. We see salmonberries and huckleberries, plenty of food for the bears. The colors are light greens and yellows it is the end of the season. It is during the time of the eleventh moon in the Squamish calendar, the last moon. We can only prepare for winter now. The plants are losing their leaves, others seem to be putting out their last fruit.

We are not alone. Snakes scurry off the trail, we hear animals in the bushes. It is a comforting feeling as nature prepares for the next stage. The rain we encountered at the beginning of the hike has subsided. The forest canopy is like an umbrella that stops the rain. As we head deeper into the forest the trail turns and we no longer see the rock slide. We no longer hear the sounds of the river. We are alone with the wind as we continue our journey. We walk quietly: only the sound of our footsteps and our clothes give us away. We do not speak. Instead we concentrate on the walk and we are mindful that we are in a sacred place. I focus on the thought that we are hiking up the side of a mountain and the goal of reaching the plateau.



People in the forest.

I want to be a part of the forest. I want to be a part of the place. I want feel it. I want to smell and hear it. I think about the fact that many people will never come this far into the wilderness. As I hike I see plants for what they are used for food and medicine. The plants beckon me however I realize they conceal uneven ground and drop-offs. I stay on the trail.

I understand what the plants are, and what they are used for. I wonder what others see when they look at these same plants. I try to remember back to before I knew what the plants were.

This place this elevation, this is where plants have been harvested for hundreds of years by the Squamish and Lil'wat peoples. These plants do not grow on the the trails below at lower elevations. How did they find this place? Where were the trails?

Hundreds of years ago people came here. They would have hiked for days to reach this place. Now I can drive to the trailhead in an hour. As we continue to hike, the forest becomes more dense. The greens are darker, the undergrowth is thicker, the plants have changed again. I think about the fact that many of the plants that were used for medicinal purposes were found in areas of disturbance. I consider the idea that disturbance, and the changes that result from it, are a part of the balance of nature.

It is fall. This would have been the last time of the year that this ascent would have been attempted. I know this because our journey coincides with a moon phase. It is the last moon before winter, and these are the last berries of the year. I realize this may be why I feel so oddly unprepared. It is like I am being warned that winter could come at any time.



Walk with me through the woods. As we start along the trail you hear the sound of the river far below in the canyon. The sky is clear. An eagle flies overhead. We pass through the remnant of an old slide. There are alders growing here and wildflowers surround the well-worn path. As we hike, the sound of the river begins to fade away, the sounds now are of birds. A garter snake darts alongside the trail in the grass. The sun is bright at this point. As we walk, plants brush against us. We are a part of the trail.

Up ahead you see the forest; majestic stands of old growth fir, hemlock and cedar. You enter the forest. A barrier along the trail calls attention to a rock face. The forest envelopes you, the trail beckons you. As you walk along your views are focused through a physical connection with the trail. Focusing your views as you wind through the path creates a feeling of intrigue. There is a curiosity about what lies ahead. As the forest grows darker and the trees grow larger there is a feeling that you are somewhere sacred. As we continue through the forest we come across small streams, marshy areas, and medicinal plants. The connections we make here are unique to this elevation. As we continue on, the trees draw our gaze upward. Their canopies are so thick you cannot see the sky. We see mushrooms, birds, wildflowers and rocks. As we hike the forest opens up. There is a feeling that we may be coming closer to the plateau. Every turn is mysterious. You cannot see the river but you know it is there. There are many streams along the way, there is a faint echo from the river. As we begin to hear it there is a feeling of familiarity. The sound of the water is comforting, it envelopes the forest. We head further into the forest.

Underfoot there are tiny plants, tiny flowers, mosses, lichens, dirt and rotting wood. Deep in the forest devil's club rules the shade. It keeps you away - no fool would go near it. It grows where it wants creating the illusion that the ground is even. It shades the forest floor. Trees grow above the plants. The trees are beautiful and huge and wet. Raindrops fall through the branches, but we are protected from the downpour.



Contemplation garden.

The river is close now. We stop to look through the trees, it is there. The plants have changed, the barriers guide us. We come to the top of a hill where there is a threshold. Two yellow cedars frame the view towards a group of vine maples. The trail continues as we walk towards the maples where we discover a space designed for contemplation. As we come to this place the view of the lake opens up in front of us. Pathways lead you towards the east, with the mountains to your north. Headed down towards the lake there is a gently sloping area where you can sit. It is hidden from the upper trail, allowing a place for a quiet view. Open areas above create opportunities for visitors to access the lake.

The retreat at Cheakamus Lake offers a quiet place of contemplation. It is designed to be a destination where one may come to clear one's mind and attend nature while uniting the site with the surrounding environment.

I set out to answer the question, can Landscape Architects design spaces that inspire contemplative thought? What I concluded was that while designers can create places where contemplative thought may occur, it is not design that facilitates contemplation. You do not have to go into the wilderness, you can retreat in a park by your house or in your backyard. You just need to allow yourself.

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Coda

We begin at the center, and our impulse is outward. Throughout a lifetime, whether our track seems meandering or straight, we are constantly in motion, getting on with things, going somewhere. But *where*? At moments along the path we want to know how far we've come; we turn around, but our point of origin is obscure. Finally it occurs to us to look left and right. In one direction, there is still far to go, as far as when we started; in the other direction is that place we have always thought was behind us. It's been at our shoulder the whole way. Has the center traveled with us, an unnoticed companion? Or have we been walking in place as the world flows by? Either way, we will proceed.

(Goehlke, Accomodating Nature 83)