

## Reaching New Heights

by: Barb Miller

A few weeks ago, Gordie and I had an opportunity to hike a new area, for us anyway, Castle Rock in the Chester Basin area. We made plans with our good friends, Connie and Jamey, booked an Airbnb and off we went.

Now we are a tad bit older than our friends, but Connie had hiked this trail before and assured us that we would be fine; after all, we'd hiked Skyline Trail a year ago so no worries, right?

The hike was approximately 9 km round trip from the parking lot and, starting out, it was easy, peasy...until we reached the *actual* trail head! From there we decided, after consulting the map of the trail options, that we would trek the "most difficult" trail because it was a bit shorter and we all felt we were up to the challenge. It was a challenge indeed!

Of course, Gordie and I had opted to leave our walking sticks at home...don't recommend that as we definitely would have benefitted from having them.



However, we pressed onward and upward. The steep hill got our heart rates up to a healthy workout speed and we all appreciated a little standing rest when we reached that first peak.

From there the trail began to get quite rocky, although it did level off somewhat for a stretch. We did some weaving around wet areas and rocky spots, with a few climbs up and down rocky areas, but nothing too daunting.

At one point we stopped to take a look at our progress and Connie pointed farther up and said, "That's where we're heading!" Yeah, sure it is! Well she wasn't kidding! Castle Rock is exactly that... a huge rock at the top of a bunch of other big rocks!



So, on we go...happily (cautiously? nervously?) looking forward to reaching the top so we could enjoy the snacks we packed and have a few moments to appreciate the incredible view from "up there".

The last ½ km or so was very rocky and we took our time maneuvering around and over the more treacherous ones to reach the top. (I won't lie, I was sitting on my butt to ease down from some of them!) I can assure you, it is worth the effort to get there!

We happened to be the only ones up there at that time, for a few minutes anyway, and took in the stunning view in awe and amazement... Awe at the beauty before us, and amazement that we had made it without breaking any bones! Mind you, we hadn't started down from there yet so...don't get too sure of yourself!

A few others arrived as we were having our snacks so we chatted and took a few photos before we decided to take the easy route back down. The others, who were much younger than us I might add, had come up the easier trail and said it was no problem. We weren't sure if they were silently thinking "no problem for you old folks" or if they were impressed that these "old folks" had actually made it up there on the difficult trail! No matter, we were impressed that we had made it, for sure!

The easy trail was certainly less rocky but it still had quite a steep descent which was gravelly under foot, so care was needed to not slip on the loose gravel. We were thankful to reach the road that would take us back to our vehicle, you know, the easy peasy part! It was a lovely walk with a view of the lake and streams along the way, also our first sighting of mayflowers this year. We stopped at a picnic table to have a break and watched the ducks and pondered what it would feel like to soak our feet in the icy cold water at the edge of the lake. If not for having to fight to get our socks and boots back on wet feet, I believe we might have tried it. Next time!

At the end of the day we were all tuckered out and ready to shed the hiking shoes and put our feet up – but first there was a unanimous decision – we all deserved an ice cream cone after all that exercise! When we got back to the house there may have been naps, and tub soaks, and perhaps a "beverage" or two before supper and an evening of card playing and laughter and story-telling!

Our hearts were full of gratitude for great friends and beautiful views of the sunsets/sunrises from our windows over-looking the Chester Basin.

Another notch in the 'new adventure belt' for us "old folks" (that would be Gordie and I!). As we think back about how challenging the hike was, we also have much appreciation for strong legs and bodies, even if it did take a couple of days to fully recover. And grateful for our "young friends" who enjoy seeing new places around Nova Scotia with us!

A few tips if you have a notion to do this hike:

**Make a plan and do it!**

Wear hiking shoes/boots; take a backpack with water and a snack; take walking sticks; wait for spring warmth to dry up the ground so the trail won't be wet and slippery; pace yourself – it's not a race, it's a journey; plan to take at least 15-20 minutes at the top to fully enjoy the view; go with friends and enjoy the view as you ascend and descend, as well as on the Rock itself.

This could actually be a day trip if you're pressed for time, but why squeeze it all in on one day when you can stretch it out into a weekend away with friends! Life is short – do the road trips, and the hikes, when you get the chance.

