



**Stoney Creek Trail Report  
No. 72 - March 2025**

The **Front Page photo** shows our first look at this year’s salmon hatch. The photo is enlarged so it’s a bit blurry, but looking closely you should see what we believe to be five

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Chum fry. They are about 3 cm in length. They’ve emerged from the alevin stage and their yolk sacs are gone. Please take a look at [this video](#) on the Stoney Creek website, taken on March 3rd, to see them in action. By the time you receive this, it may be too late to see them yourself because Chum fry migrate to the ocean as soon as they are able. However, Coho fry will have made an appearance by now, and they’ll remain in the creek for a year. The pool across from Sadie’s Bench is a good place to look for them—please keep your dog out!

Incidentally, “Chum” is a Chinook word meaning “striped,” which describes the bold blotches on the sides of spawning adults. Looking at these photos, you can see that fry also have distinctive markings. [[Chinook](#) is a jargon (made-up language) originally created by French and English fur traders in the 19th century to facilitate trade with native peoples in the Pacific Northwest].

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In last month’s issue, I wondered whether **skunk cabbages** would return to the boggy area below the Forks which had been much disrupted during the installation of the new Bridge 5. Well, they’re back!

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Although some **early buds** are featured in this issue, spring blooming won’t really get rolling until next month, then [peak in May](#).

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In the [March Snow Survey Bulletin](#), the snow level in BC overall was reported to be 73% of normal, which is higher than the 66% reported for March last year. Our Lower Fraser snow basin index was observed to be at 69% of normal. It should improve, as we’ve had a lot of rain late this month and there are still weeks left in the snow accumulation season. The April bulletin will be published on the 9th and will give us the March data.

***This issue completes [six years](#) of Trail Reports!***



## Early Buds



**Above:** Red-flowering currant and Indian plum (Osoberry). **Below:** Beaked hazelnut and Bitter cherry. All of these were taken along the Hemlock Hill portion of the Trail.



## Cascade Oregon-grape (*Berberis nervosa*)



The *Berberis nervosa*, also known as dwarf Oregon-grape, Cascade barberry, or dull Oregon-grape, is native to the West Coast, from BC down to California. It is often found where there are pools of sunlight in forests.

This evergreen shrub can reproduce via seeds or by vegetative means, sprouting from rhizomes which extend laterally through the soil. It is resistant to summer drought and tolerates poor soils.

The flowers bloom in early spring and are a particular favourite of bees, which are key pollinators. The nectar and pollen are important to early-season queen bees establishing nests.

Its berries, about 7 mm in diameter and growing in clusters, become dark-blue and tart-tasting when ripe.



## The Return of the Skunk Cabbages

The major disruption along the trail below the Forks, due to the replacement of Bridge 5, has not eliminated the resident population of skunk cabbages after all.

The species here in BC is the Western skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*).

Sometimes called “swamp lantern,” it is a semi-aquatic plant found in ditches, sloughs,



and other boggy areas. It can grow in shade or full light and in a range of different soil conditions. It is common along the Fraser River and thrives in disturbed environments like the wetland south of Bridge 5.

As we have seen, the Skunk cabbage blooms in late winter. Its distinctive, large,

bright yellow “flowers” are actually spathes, or sheaths, that enclose a spike of tiny yellowish-green flowers. Flies and beetles are attracted by the bright colour as well as the pungent odor that repels both us and most mammals. As the flowers die back, huge “cabbage” leaves will appear, growing from the base of the plant.



It was introduced in Europe in the early 20th century as an ornamental plant for ponds and wet sites, but escaped and became an invasive, able to out-compete native species. The EU has added it to the list of plants that can't be sold, cultivated, or released into the wild.

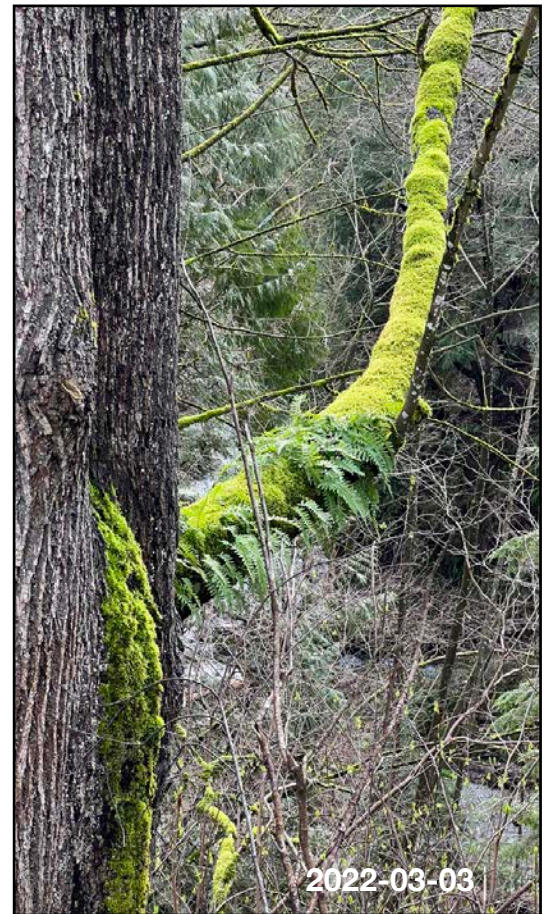
Historically, the plant was not normally part of the diet of indigenous people, but it could be an emergency food source in times of famine. Its large, tropical-looking leaves are somewhat poisonous, as they contain crystals of calcium oxylate. However, they were useful as a medicated bandage for injuries and were important in food preparation and storage, commonly used to line berry baskets and to wrap around whole salmon and other foods for baking in an open fire.

## A Closer Look at the Bigleaf Maple (1/2)

In BC, the Bigleaf maple is found primarily in the mild, moist climate of the southwestern corner. A young Bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) usually grows from a single trunk, but as it matures it has a very distinctive growth structure. It develops multiple large, heavy trunks and splits into big, arching limbs giving it a rather sprawling appearance.



Its branching, often wide-reaching and irregular, results in a rounded, somewhat open crown that can spread nearly as wide as the tree is tall. In the right conditions, these trees can reach 40 m in height, but more often you'll see them in the 15–20 m range in the Fraser Valley.



If placed end-to-end, the branches of large Bigleaf maple could stretch nearly a kilometre. Standing under a mature tree feels almost like being in a big, open, moss-draped cathedral, with massive limbs filtering light through giant leaves. Large horizontal branches are common, and in moist environments they're typically adorned with moss, lichens, and frequently ferns. In the photo above you can see Licorice ferns that live on most of the Bigleaf maples along the trail.

## A Closer Look at the Bigleaf Maple (2/2)

The lower branches of Bigleaf maples often die as the tree focuses on its upper canopy. The ones that have experienced dieback can stay attached for a long time unless removed or broken off.

Climate change has contributed to tree damage in the Fraser Valley, particularly affecting species such as the Western redcedar. Research indicates that warmer, drier summers have led to drought stress in these trees, making them more susceptible to dieback.

In the Fraser Valley and Washington State, studies have also linked Bigleaf maple decline to the stress of hotter, drier summers. It's plausible that the dieback, such as what we see in these photos, is worsening because of climate change.



## Licorice Ferns

The Licorice fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*), also known as “many-footed fern” and “sweet root,” is a small, deciduous fern native to the Pacific Northwest. It typically grows on mossy tree trunks, logs, and rocks in moist, shady forests, with a special preference for Bigleaf maple trees. Its name comes from the sweet, licorice-like flavor of its rhizomes (sub-surface stems), which were traditionally chewed by Indigenous peoples for both flavor and medicinal purposes, particularly for sore throats and coughs.

This fern has simple, lance-shaped fronds that grow between 10 and 50 cm in length, often in loose clumps. The underside of their fronds is dotted with spore-producing sori, giving them a rusty appearance.

Unlike many ferns that grow from a central crown, the Licorice fern’s fronds grow from creeping rhizomes that spread along surfaces, often hidden under moss.

The Licorice fern is an epiphyte, as it derives its moisture and nutrients from the air and rain.

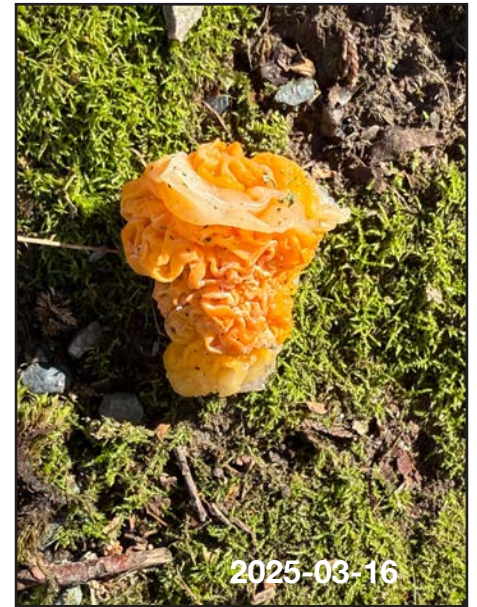
Licorice ferns thrive in damp environments and are often most visible in fall and winter, when other plants have died back. In summer, they may go dormant or reduce activity if conditions become too dry.



This beautiful plant adds a great deal to the lush character of our forests here in southwestern British Columbia.



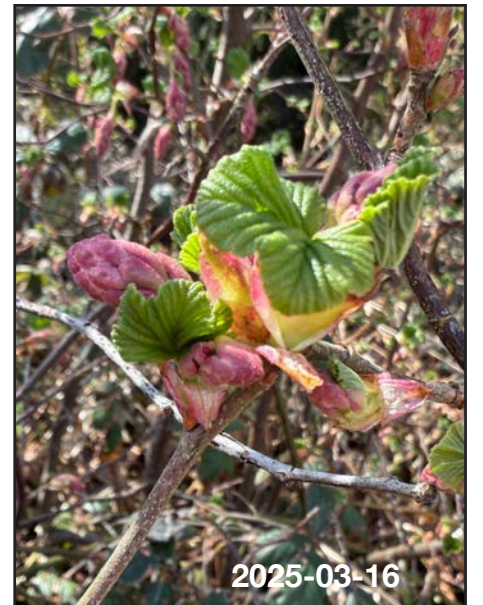
## Odd and Ends



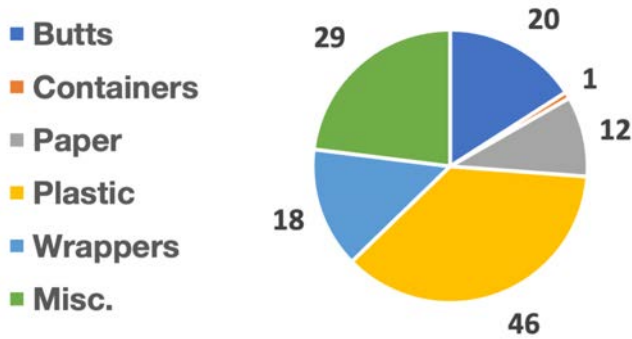
**Top:** The drooping branches are typical of the yellowcedar. A Cherry-plum tree near the Pond met a sad end. A Golden ear fungus.

**Middle:** The European holly (left) might be mistaken for the Oregon-grape (right).

**Bottom:** Thousands of Coho fry from Stoney Creek spawners are now living in a Cap trough [at the hatchery](#). Red-flowering currant buds on the Hill are early-opening.



### Litter Tally March 2025



Total litter items = 126

**Containers:** bottles, bottle tops, cans, coffee cups, lids, juice boxes.

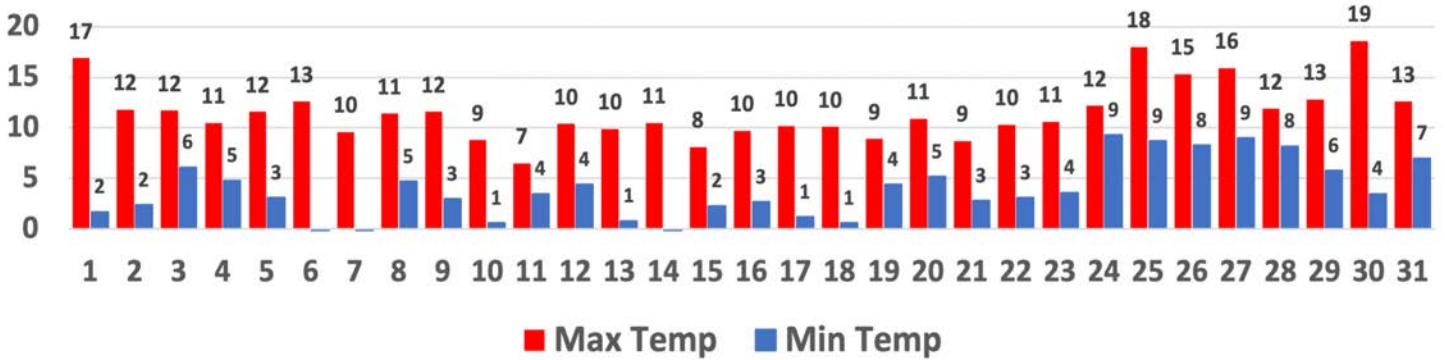
**Paper:** tissues, napkins, posters, newspaper, receipts, cardboard, etc.

**Plastic:** dog waste bags & bits, plastic bags, other items made of plastic.

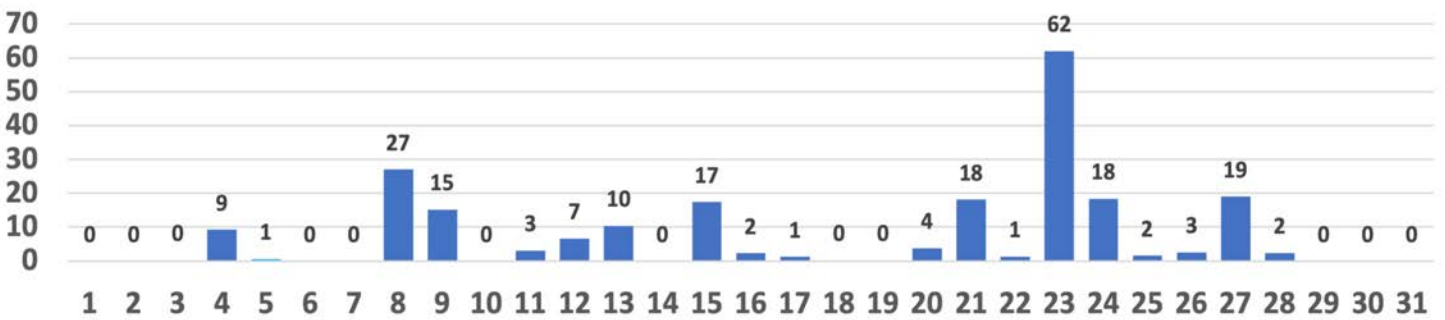
**Wrappers:** candy wrappers, foil, cellophane.

**Miscellaneous:** clothing, glass, chewing gum, dog balls & fragments, etc.

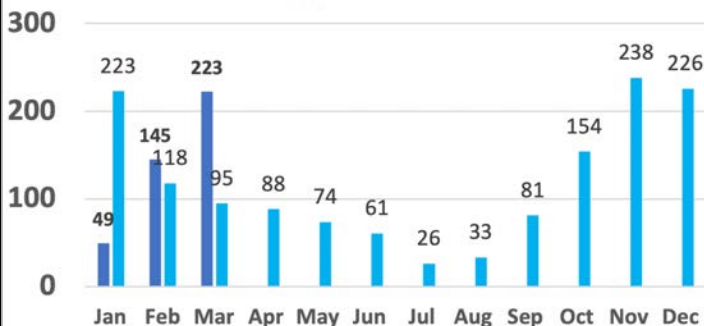
### Air temperature at YXX March 2025 (°C)



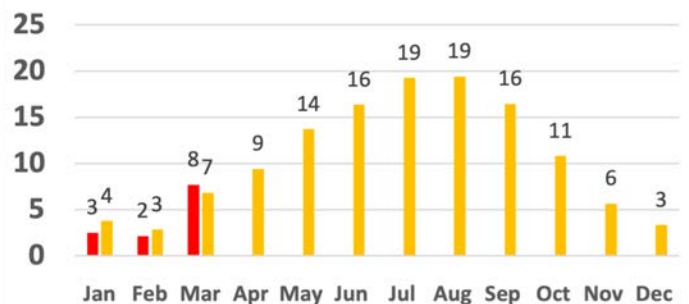
### Precipitation at YXX March 2025 Total = ? mm



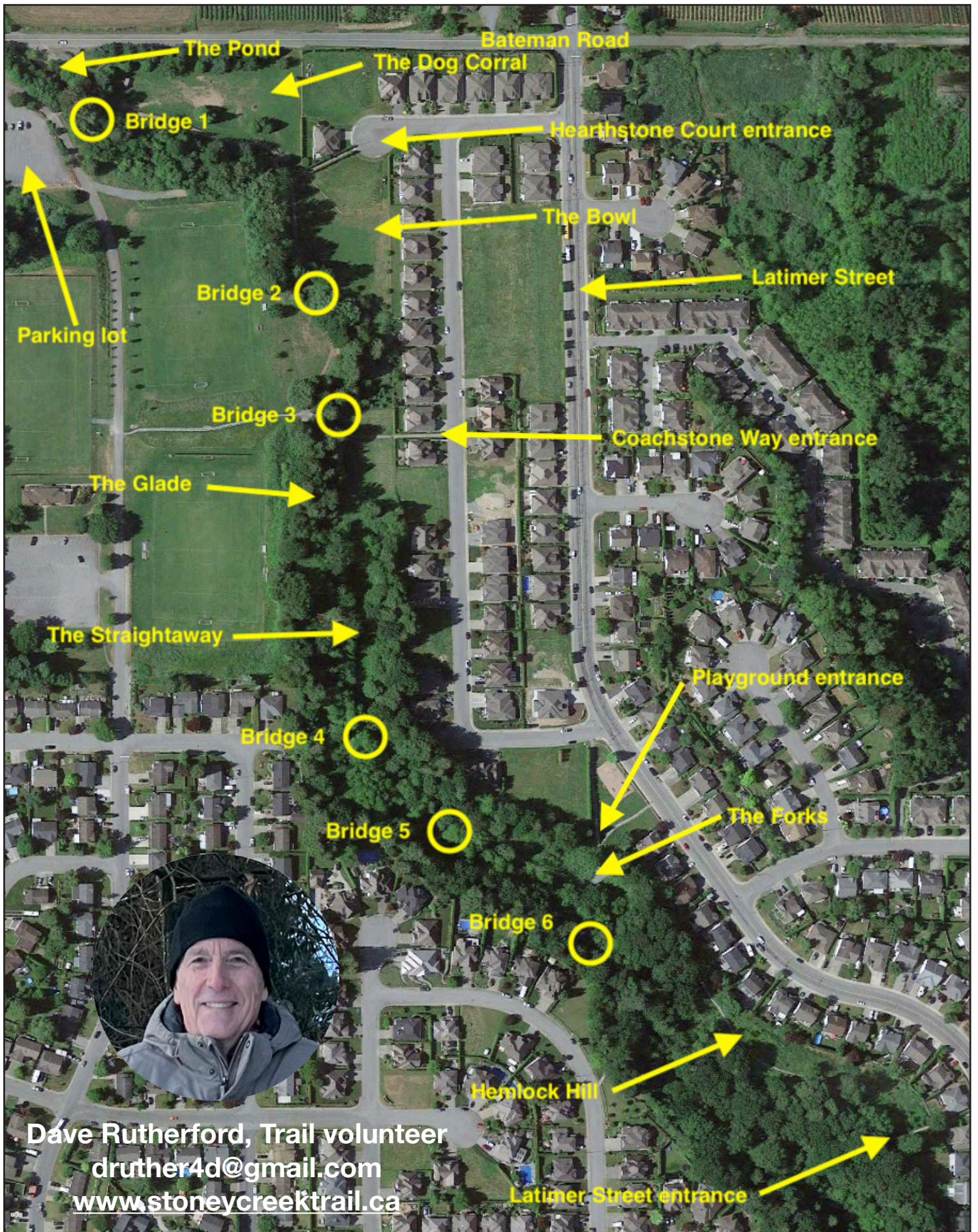
### Precipitation in 2025 (mm) Average: 2019-2024



### Average Temperatures in 2025 Average: 2019-2024



For convenience, I use these custom place-names:



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