

## BRETT'S ARTICLE

It was a whirlwind weekend full of emotions, but I thought I'd share a few details and photos of where Yvonna & Spike joined me for one last hike together.

Yesterday morning, I joined six members of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) at the Monument dedicated to the 1st Can. Parachute Batt. near Siffleur Falls, AB. Our objective was to reach the summit of Normandy Peak (part of Mt. Ex Colis - meaning "Out of the Clouds"). At the summit, there is a small cairn dedicated to paratroop members who have passed away. This, as it turns out, is an absolutely stunning location for a final rest.

Our route followed the Siffleur Falls hiking trail, across



both bridges and a long wooden boardwalk for several km's, and then veered left (NE ish) along a decommissioned fire access road to the gully between Normandy and Ardennes peaks. We then proceeded directly up a rocky drainage covered with fallen trees, overgrown alder, and many, many thistle bushes.



This is where I began to regret not wearing pants for the hike. This bushwhacking continued for approx 2 hours as the trees thinned out and the pitch steepened. The mossy/grassy ground transitioned to loose shale as

we reached the mid-way point (4km of 8km)... however we had only completed approx 1/3 of the vertical (350m of 1,050m total). The next chunk of the climb would be very steep, very loose shale, with several "pucker factor" moments built in.

The quickest way to the top was to go directly up a steep drainage that would normally be the ideal avalanche terrain trap, had there been any snow left. However, this still meant that we had to be wary of the climbers above and below, as a miss-judged step would send a slough of rocks tumbling downwards at the other climbers.

I spent the next two hours gaining two feet in elevation at a time and sliding back down one. Over, and over again. Occasionally, someone above would yell "ROCK!" loudly, and that was a gentle reminder to get the hell out of the way before the bouncing shale found you first.



We reached the summit of Normandy Peak at noon. There were moderate winds, broken sunshine, and large black clouds moving directly towards us from the West. We knew we only had approx 10 mins at the summit before we'd have to leave.

The PPCLI members lay out their Camp Flag just below the cairn, and briefly spoke about the meaning of this day. The Warrant Officer then recited the Airborne Creed from memory:





**What manner of men are these who wear the maroon beret?**

***They are, firstly, all volunteers and are toughened by hard physical training. As a result they have that infectious optimism and that offensive eagerness which comes from physical well-being. They have "jumped" from the air and by so doing have conquered fear.***

***Their duty lies in the van of the battle; they are proud of this honour and have never failed in any task. They have the highest standards in all things whether it be skill in battle or smartness in the execution of all peace time duties. They have shown themselves to be as tenacious and determined in defence as they are courageous in the attack. They are, in fact, men apart - every man an Emperor.***

***Of all the factors which make for success in battle the spirit of the warrior is the most decisive. That spirit will be found in full measure in the men who wear the maroon beret.***

He then motioned that it was time to spread Yvonna & Spike's ashes on the cairn.

Although I have never had the opportunity to spread ashes before, I *have* watched the movie 'The Big Lebowski' and know what **not** to do. Suddenly, the winds calmed down and the sun seemed to feel just a little bit warmer on my back as it poked through a crack in the clouds.

I took a moment to pause, and look around at the stunning scenery. I thought about how Baba & Didi touched the lives of SO many over the years. I thought about how many wished they could have joined us at the mountain summit, but were unable to. I thought about how this last year had forced the members of this family to be apart, and had ultimately kept us from being with Spike in his final moments. I thought about how hard this last six months has been on Oksana, Lydia, Stephen, my Dad, and countless others. There were a thousand prophetic things I *could* have said to wrap this all up in a neat little bow up there - but yet

no words in my vocabulary could appropriately express what we have **all** been thinking and feeling.

But finally somehow... through this deluge of emotion... I managed a slight smile as I thought about how happy my grandparents would be knowing that they were *finally* back together.



***"Fair winds and soft landings, jumper. Airborne!"***

The descent followed roughly the same route, and brought us back to the Siffleur Falls parking lot just after the rest of the Romanow/Stewart/McLean/Wowk clan finished their hike. The whole trip was approx 16km long, took 8 hours, and had over 1,050m of elevation.

It was quite the privilege to join the PPCLI to the summit of Ex Colis. Those guys were truly a class-act, and represent the maroon beret to a tee. The Warrant Officer met Spike several years prior, and was incredibly professional in ensuring the ashes received the care and respect they deserved.

I've included a link (below) to some photos that might help show the journey a bit better. I wish you could have all been there in person, but I know that you were with us in spirit. It makes one question how that black storm cloud missed us, while absolutely pummeling every other mountain range in the vicinity. Thanks for keeping watch over me, Baba & Didi!

Rest peacefully. We'll take it from here.

Brett

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/QuvHEKNchN2L1Bcu7>

**p.s. please share as needed.**