

Rain or Shine, Tubbs Hill is a Friend for Life

By David Kilmer

I've just returned from an early morning ramble on Tubbs Hill, and once again, the place has worked its charms.

My lungs still feel the sharp inhalations of air shared with fir, moss and ferns, and my feet still feel the drumming of the trail. As I climb back into my tugboat at the Floating Boardwalk Marina, and gaze out the portside windows at the object of my unreasonable affection, I remember the full moon through those trees last night.



I watch now as the trail welcomes other runners and walkabout dreamers, and I try to put into words the vast affection so many of us feel. How can a few acres of wild land mean this much?

One thing's for sure. Every time I've needed Tubbs Hill, it's been there for me.

It's a remarkable place; a rock-and-pine peninsula that feels more like a private island, so near The Coeur d'Alene Resort and downtown CdA that in a matter of minutes I can be transported there. I've hiked, ran, paddled and swam Tubbs Hill uncounted days, and come away better every time.

When I needed some male bonding with my boy, I cannonballed off a high rock, a local rite of passage. When I needed clarity, I sprinted up the steepest trail I could find and stood victorious at the top, with whatever small problem I wrestled now resolved – or maybe just dissolved. And when I needed consolation, I simply sat there and let Mother Nature, the master therapist, go to work with clouds, sunlight, rain and wind in the branches overhead.



Tubbs Hill always puts on a show. One raw January morning, I slid my way along icy tracks, ears brittle and lips numb. Everyone with any sense was gone. But there's always a reward – in this case the chance to duck into the lee of a Ponderosa pine, feel sunshine on my face for the first time in weeks and watch the ravens do their thing in the perfectly blue sky.

In spring, I watch for the right timing – several weeks after the snow has melted off the hillsides – and I plan a hike with my mom, who loves wildflowers. Together, we admire the ephemeral splendor of grass widows, glacier lilies and the occasional lady slipper.



Summer brings the place alive with an entertaining mix of humans. Early in the day come the runners, faces focused on tempo and the concentration of staying nimble through roots and rocks. Dog walkers come later. I'm sure for many of Coeur d'Alene's canines, the words "Tubbs Hill" rocket them off the couch just as fast as my little Jack Russell, who could sprint those trails merrily for hours. Tubbs is dog friendly, but mind the leash requirements less you run afoul of the law (as my dog Sammy and I may or may not have done).

Summer afternoons have a festive atmosphere on Tubbs Hill, with couples picnicking, yachts passing and kids taking their first steps in sand and water.

As much as I relish solitude, the best thing about Tubbs Hill is the smiles, waves and conversation. People are happy here. Ask visitors and locals and you'll find a common love for Tubbs Hill and all that it means. How many ideas have come to life along these trails? How many tears shed? How many vital epiphanies?



Where do you want your loved ones to take you one last time when they scatter your ashes? I can think of a few good places around the globe, but closest to home it will be Tubbs Hill, absolutely.

Animal sightings are always a treat. I know a friend who was forced to take shelter in a rock outcropping as a moose and her baby wandered past. Moose have right of way here.

My best day on Tubbs Hill was the time I played hide-and-seek with a fox. I was wrung out, burned out, merely stumbling up the trail. The place must have sensed what I needed.

There appeared the fox with tall ears and plumed tail, looking at me from the ridge. It didn't run away and didn't let me approach. Like a scene from *The Little Prince*, that mysterious creature and I followed each other through rocks, trees and silence for a magical hour or so. The weight came off my shoulders and I even laughed into the wind. Then the fox was gone. I've looked and looked and never seen it again.



All those memories are there when I look out my boat windows.

Last week, I explored Tubbs Hill anew with a beguiling 6-year-old girl who is just now discovering the place herself. We rescued slugs from the path and searched for flowers on the hillsides and shiny rocks on the beach. For an hour, I was a child again.

I know she'll be back to Tubbs Hill. I trust it will captivate, challenge and soothe her, and always be there for her, as well as her children and grandchildren, for all time.



About the Author: David Kilmer sails boats and tells stories, with gusto at every opportunity. He is also one of our great Trail Volunteers. He lives in Coeur d'Alene for three seasons and on a sailboat in warm water during the winter.