Terrace Peaks Gymnastics Invitational on April 12

Harvin Bhathal

Prince Rupert gymnasts now have another opportunity for competition.

This weekend the Rupert club will be at the Terrace Peaks Invitational. The Terrace gymnastics club is hosting the event, which had been an annual meet up until 2019.

"This event is not only a celebration of local talent but also a significant fundraiser for our club. We invite you to come down and cheer on our athletes as they showcase their amazing skills," said Keira Almas, general manager of the Terrace Peaks Gymnastics Club.

When the pandemic began in spring 2020, the club had to close and the board let all the staff go. It took until fall 2022 to have enough staff to run their regular programs, but only recreationally.

In fall 2023, they ran a small invitational program but the athletes were too new to the sport to participate in competitions.

It was not until this year the club had enough staff and membership to begin competing again. The Terrace Peaks sent 14 athletes to Smithers on Feb. 1 for the 2025 Smithers Saltos Invitational, 13 of whom competed for the first time.

"I'm just really, really proud of how far our club as come since COVID and how hard our athletes have been working," said Almas after the Invitational in Smithers.

At the Terrace Peaks Invitational, more than 100 talented athletes from Terrace, Kitimat, Prince Rupert and Smithers will be competing in 11 categories across four sessions. The event begins at 8:30 a.m. and finishes at 6:30 p.m. on April 12. Hosted at the Ed Fairless Memorial Gymnasium in Thornhill, B.C. tickets are $10 for adults and $5 each for children and seniors.

There is a special family price of $20, but there can only be a maximum of two adults in the group.



The Terrace Peaks Gymnastics Club gymnasts impressed at their first competition in five years. (Photo courtesy of Terrace Peaks Gymnastics Club)

The Nature Nut — Rosamund Pojar



Soapberry (Shepherdia canadensis) male flowers with rusty brown scales on the leaves in Okanagan Mountain Park. (Jim Pojar)

Before Christmas, I started talking about how to tell shrubs and trees in winter, but I got sidetracked.

One of the shrubs with opposite buds that is quite fascinating is soapberry or soopolallie because it does not have bud scales. Bud scales are small leaf-shaped structures designed to protect the bud during dormancy.

Soapberry is one of a few shrubs that do not have bud scales, perhaps because the tiny overwintering parts (leaf and flower buds) are covered in whitish-silvery hairs on the inside and brown scaly flat hairs on the outside. The hairs protect them from losing water and desiccating or freezing.

The leaf buds consist of two miniature leaves, rounded and pointed upward. One of my college students noted they looked like a pair of praying hands (like praying shepherds) which helped him learn the Latin name – *Shepherdia canadensis*.

The flower buds are in the axil or angle between the vertical twig and the side branch. Flowers open shortly before the leaves and are among the first plants to flower in spring – right about now.

Male and female flowers are pale yellow-green to brownish, very tiny and occur on different plants (dioecious). The males have several stamens sticking outward, whereas the females only have one ovary pointing outward.

The fruits of soapberry are red and shiny looking as if they would be juicy and delicious.

However, they contain saponin – the same stuff found in soap. Despite their unpleasant soapy taste, the berries were (and still are) highly valued by Indigenous people.

Traditionally, berries were whipped into a foam, sometimes adding sweeter fruits such as salmonberries or wild strawberries.

Today, sugar is often used. Since the berries will not foam up if the bowl used is greasy, a special bowl was used only for making this ice-cream-like dessert. When I gave my students soapberry foam to try, I discovered that, while most found the soapberries bitter, some could not taste the bitterness and loved the foam so much they would eat a whole bowl full.

Soapberry prefers to grow in the drier interior country, so berries were traded with coastal people along the grease trails in exchange for eulachon (oolichan) grease and ocean foods.

Typically, they ate soapberry dessert eaten after a meal to cleanse the mouth by cutting the oiliness of the main meal, but some report it can be eaten before a meal to stimulate the appetite.



Soapberry (Shepherdia canadensis) found in the Telkwa Mountains. (Jim Pojar)

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