

Take a Hike

Discover the West Coast on Foot

By Belinda Bruce

Southwestern British Columbia is a trekker's paradise. Numerous walking and hiking trails meander through a landscape of natural wonders: rainforests, mountains, ocean, glaciers, streams, alpine meadows and more. At any turn, you may encounter fascinating wildlife including whales, seals, salmon, bears and a wide variety of birds. From invigorating day hikes and refreshing strolls to multi-day, thigh-burning wilderness treks, there's a path to suit hikers of all levels. If your personal mantra is "These boots were made for walking," read on.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Spectacular hiking opportunities abound on Vancouver Island. From simple one-hour strolls to week-long treks, these trails take you into a storied past of ancient cultures, shipwrecks, old-growth forests, mining and fishing adventures, and centuries-old beauty that never gets tired.

Victoria has some of the best hiking trails in Canada. Challenging routes begin right inside the city such as **Galloping Goose Trail** (www.gallopinggoosetrail.com). Accessible from downtown or Victoria West, this trail traces 55 kilometres along an old railway line past farmland, a pretty cove and hidden lake, a Douglas-fir forest, marshland and more.

A treasured Island spot is **Goldstream Provincial Park** (www.goldstreampark.com) located about a 25-minute drive northwest of downtown Victoria via Highway 1. Trails range from easy to difficult and anywhere from 15 minutes to three hours, punctuated by towering 600-year-old cedars, interesting flora, salmon streams and frequent eagle sightings. **Gold Mine Trail** features 47.5-metre (156-ft) Niagara Falls, a railway trestle and an old gold mine shaft. The challenging **Mt. Finlayson Trail**

takes you through a Douglas-fir forest up to the mountain's 419-m (1,375-ft) summit. Enjoy beautiful views of Victoria, Finlayson Arm and the Bear Mountain Golf Club at the top.

The stuff of legendary hikes beckons: the West Coast Trail

Strathcona Provincial Park is an immense mountain wilderness of over 250,000 hectares—the largest park on the Island and the oldest in BC. Alpine scenery awaits: rugged mountains, glacial lakes, waterfalls, dramatic bluffs and high-altitude meadows. Della Falls, at 440 m (1,444 ft), one of Canada's highest waterfalls, is found in the southern part of the park. Access the park

via Highway 19 and Mount Washington Road, a 30- to 40-minute drive from Courtenay or via Highway 28, a 30-minute drive from Campbell River. Best from May to October.

For an awe-inspiring walk through stands of giant Douglas-fir trees, some as old as 800 years, head to **Cathedral Grove** in MacMillan Provincial Park. Located on either side of Highway 4 about 16 km east of Port Alberni, these ten- to twenty-minute loop trails are excellent for family outings. The northern-side trails lead to Cameron Lake, where you can fish, swim or picnic. Along the path, look for the many woodpeckers, owls, reptiles, deer, elk, black bear and cougar that call this forest home.

There's a trail for everyone at family-friendly **Mount Washington** (www.mountwashington.ca), a seventy-five minute drive north of Nanaimo. The rugged **West Summit Ridge**

VANCOUVER, COAST & MOUNTAINS

West Coast Trail (www.westcoasttrailbc.com). The 75-km route stretches along the coastline between Bamfield and Port Renfrew on the west coast of the Island. Carved out of the rainforest in 1906 to provide a refuge and escape path for shipwrecked mariners, the area was so dangerous it was dubbed "The Graveyard of the Pacific." Here you'll find waterfalls, caves, sandstone cliffs, sea arches, sea stacks, secluded beaches and tons of wildlife.

The trail takes five to seven days to complete. While you must be fit, a network of cable cars, ladders, bridges and a boardwalk make the trek manageable. There are two trailhead access points: Pachena Bay at the north end and Gordon River in the south, which is accessed by twice-daily water taxi from Port Renfrew. Planning ahead is essential, including obtaining maps and tide tables. The trail opens in May and closes September 30 with reservations required from June 16 to September 15. Call 1.800 HELLO BC (435.5622).

Trail to the 1,588-m (5,210-ft) summit leads to spectacular, 360-degree views of Strathcona Provincial Park, the Comox Glacier, Mount Arrowsmith, the Strait of Georgia and Mount Baker in Washington State. The trails open once the snow melts, usually by late June.

The 47-km **Juan de Fuca Marine Trail** stretches along the western shoreline of southern Vancouver Island from China Beach to Botanical Beach. Accessible from multiple points along Highway 14 between Jordan River and Port Renfrew, this dynamic trail features spectacular ocean and mountain vistas, waterfalls, grottos, old-growth forests, wondrous rock formations and estuaries. Both casual and experienced hikers will enjoy this route, equipped with wilderness campsites and sanitary facilities. Best time is June to September.

Old-growth Sitka spruce, salt marshes, rocky outcrops and white sand beaches

Cape Scott Trail traces an old telegraph line to Cape Scott Lighthouse, a route replete with remnants of 19th-century Danish settlements along the 48-km return trip. Highlights on this challenging trail include old-growth Sitka spruce, salt marshes, rocky outcrops and white sand beaches. Coastal wildlife includes seals, sea lions and sea otters. Located at the northwestern tip of Vancouver Island, this trail is accessed 64 km west from Port Hardy via a combination of provincial highways and logging roads. Best time is June to September.

For the adventurous trekker who knows how many packages of dehydrated fruits and vegetables to pack for a demanding course, the stuff of legendary hikes beckons: the

The breathtaking chunk of land and coastline between Vancouver and Whistler has scores of well-marked trails to suit walkers and hikers of all abilities. The beautiful North Shore Mountains, framing the city of Vancouver, provide several spectacular trails within 25 to 40 minutes of downtown.

The 3000-ha **Cypress Provincial Park**, a popular hiking destination for over 100 years, is studded with red cedars, yellow cedars and wildlife. Marvel at the stunning vistas of Vancouver and sparkling mountain lakes found below the park's peaks of 1,454-m (4,770-ft) Mount Strachan, 1,217-m (3,993-ft) Black Mountain and 1,325-m (4,347-ft) Hollyburn Mountain. Cypress boasts several trails, the most advanced being the overnight trek on the *Howe Sound Crest Trail* to the shoulder of



Whistler trails burst with pretty alpine meadows (Tourism Whistler)



A majestic resting spot awaits on the West Coast Trail (Tourism BC)

the iconic 1,654-m (5,427-ft) Lions—the two ‘bumps’ visible from downtown Vancouver. While the park is open year round, the most ideal times for hiking are from late-April to mid-October.

A favourite of locals for its hardcore aerobic workout is the **Grouse Grind™** on Grouse Mountain (www.grousemountain.com). Just a 25-minute drive from downtown, Grouse Mountain crowns North Vancouver; its renowned 2.9-km trek up to 853 m (2,800 ft), the Grouse Grind™, is so popular that it’s even been trademarked. The reward for hoofing it to the top is a magnificent, panoramic view of downtown Vancouver, the Pacific Ocean, Washington’s Mt. Baker and Vancouver Island in the distance. The trail is best in late spring through October and it’s free, but many pay the fee to ride the aerial tram down.

Alpine meadows, colourful wildflowers, stands of western red cedar

The 250-ha **Lynn Canyon Park**, located at the foot of the North Shore Mountains, features rainforest, canyons, creeks, natural pools, a suspension bridge and a café. Most people begin by crossing the Lynn Creek suspension bridge, which hangs 50 m (164 ft) above the creek, a swaying and springy experience. Once across, you can walk upstream 10 minutes to 30 Foot Pool or downstream to Twin Falls, a 15-minute walk. Admission is free.

A popular hiking destination since the 1920s, **Mount Seymour Provincial Park** has 3,508-ha of jaw-dropping old-growth and second-growth forest, meadows, small lakes, and blunt rock faces. The summit provides panoramic views of Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Indian Arm and the Coast Mountains. Get your fill of wildlife along any of the trails such as deer, black bears, coyotes, cougars and abundant bird species.

Mount Seymour Provincial park is open year round and ideal times for hiking are from late-April to mid-October.

Stawamus Chief or “the Chief” as it’s known by locals, is one of the world’s largest free-standing monoliths, rising 652 metres (2,140 ft) above Howe Sound. The steep six-kilometre roundtrip to the first summit will give fit hikers a splendid workout and provide breathtaking views of Howe Sound, the Squamish Valley and mountains for miles. Rock climbers love its sheer granite face, too. The Chief is located in Stawamus Chief Provincial Park, just five minutes south of Squamish via Highway 99. Best from March to November.

A little further afield, the vast **Garibaldi Provincial Park** offers over 90 km of established hiking routes. A popular day hike is to glacier-fed Garibaldi Lake, an 18-km roundtrip of approximately eight hours. Backpackers often camp for the night at the lake’s wilderness campground before continuing to the summit of Black Tusk, a volcanic cone remnant. Garibaldi Park can be accessed by car from five entrances

along Highway 99 between Squamish and Pemberton, starting just one hour north of Vancouver. Best from July to October.

For elevation junkies, **Whistler Mountain Trails** are some of the most captivating trails in Canada. Studded with alpine meadows, colourful wildflowers, stands of western red cedar and sparkling lakes, these trails lead as high as 2,182 m (7,160 ft) atop glacial peaks. During the warmer months after the snow melts, take the Whistler Village Gondola to the Roundhouse lookout. Access one of the mountain’s many summer hiking trails, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes in duration, including *Paleface Trail*, a 1-km journey featuring views of an extinct volcano. For a longer excursion try *Musical Bumps* and enjoy vistas of Black Tusk, Cheakamus Glacier and Cheakamus Lake. Best from July to September.

So, lace up your boots and get a whiff of fresh mountain air. Allow your wanderlust to grab hold and explore the myriad of hiking trails the West Coast has to offer. Find out more about them by visiting www.britishcolumbia.com/ParksAndTrails and the BC Parks website at www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/. 🏔️



Magnificent trees along Whistler Mountain Trails (Tourism Whistler)



Blue herons are a frequent sight on some trails (Tourism BC/Tom Ryan)



A beautiful beach view on Cape Scott Trail (Tourism BC)