

# Hiking Guide To The **Vancouver Island Backbone**



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**Hiking Guide To The**

**Vancouver**

**Island**

**Backbone**

**By Philip Stone**

**Alpine Pacific Images**  
**1996**

Hiking Guide To The Vancouver Island Backbone  
April 1996 First Edition  
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Cover Photo: Philip Stone, hiking near Tsable Mountain, Beaufort Range.

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## ***A Word About This Book***

*This guidebook is a resource for self-reliant individuals, outlining the terrain in which the Vancouver Island Backbone Route runs. The Backbone is not a complete trail, and hikers should take special note of the distinction made herein between a “trail” and a “route”.*

*This hiking guide is not a manual providing any instruction whatsoever in camping, navigation, paddling or any other activities. The author, publisher and retail stores selling this book take no responsibility for those wishing to use its contents.*

## ***New Information***

To help with future editions, new information regarding significant changes in terrain, land access, logging roads etc.. is welcome and strongly encouraged. Send info to:

**PO Box 482, Heriot Bay, BC. Canada V0P 1H0.**

## ***Emergency Telephone Numbers***

*(no charge for these numbers)*

*Marine & Air Search and Rescue-1 800 567-5111  
(or cellular \*311)*

*Forest Fire Reporting- 1 800 663-5555*

*Other Emergencies-911*

*(due to come in to service in 1996)*

# Acknowledgements

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The Vancouver Island Backbone Route is the brainchild of the Mid-Island Chapter of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee. Its 1992-93 Executive Committee provided the support necessary, to turn the concept of a mapping project in to reality. Roseanne van Schie's tireless enthusiasm and creativity were indispensable. She was the sparkplug for the project, and put in her share of the field work, enduring one of the wettest spring hikes imaginable.

The leadership and encouragement of Chairs; Sarah Brenner and, later George Gibson were vital. Thanks to John Roberts, Craig Maxwell, Greg Shea and Phil Sera for accompanying me on some of the exploratory hikes.

The costs of exploring and mapping most of the Backbone Route were funded by a Mountain Equipment Co-op grant, without which the project would not have been possible.

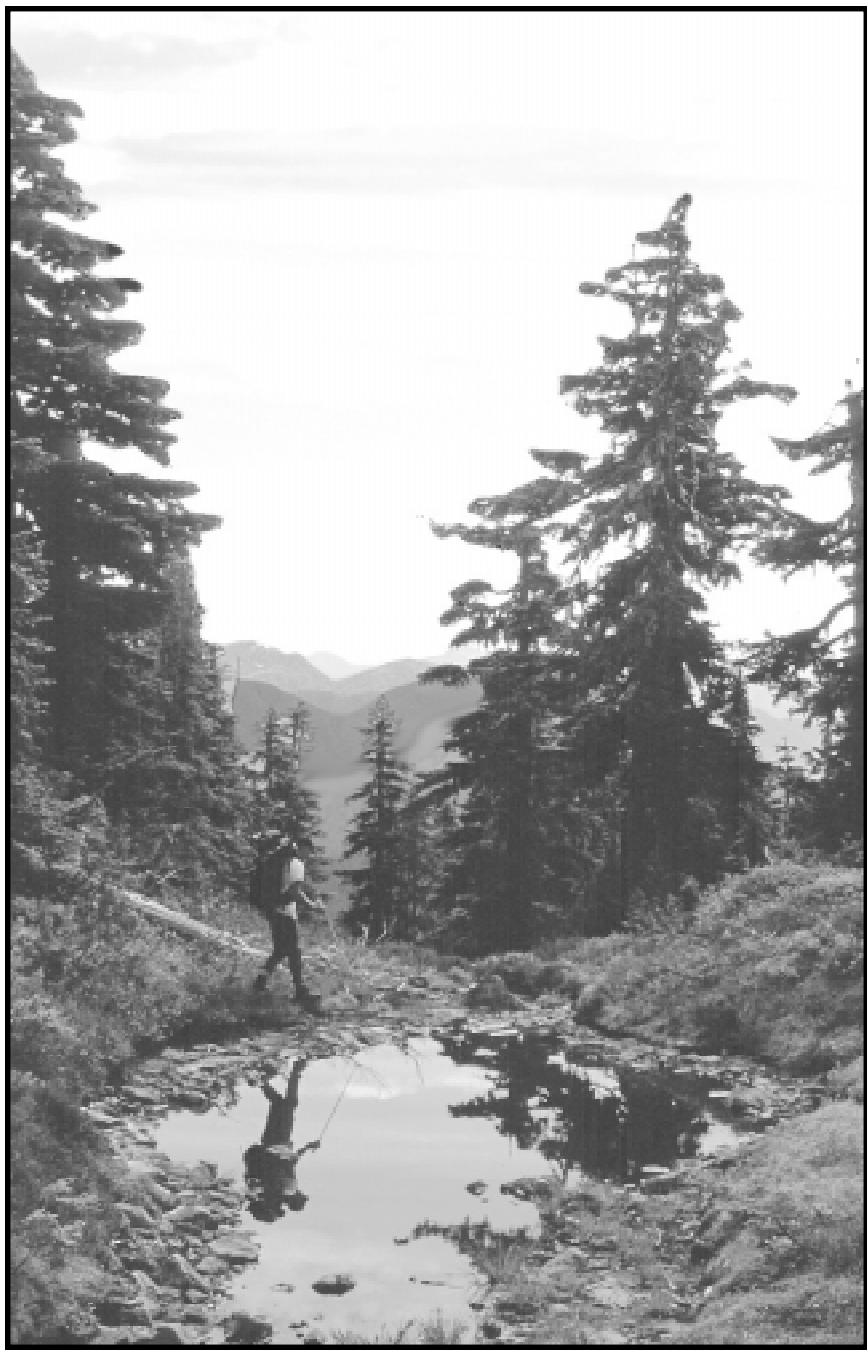
Philip Stone

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## Photo Credits:

All photographs by Philip Stone



*Greg Shea hiking on the eastern end of the Thupana Range.*

**V**ancouver Island lies just off the Pacific west coast of Canada. With a mild climate, spectacular scenery and endless recreation opportunities, the Island is quickly becoming a prime destination for outdoor adventurers. The Vancouver Island Backbone is a wilderness hiking route that weaves over 300 km (200 miles) along its mountainous interior. The route links trails, rugged alpine ridges, logging roads, lush river valleys and lakes as it charts a course from south to north. Although primarily a hiking route in concept, the Backbone covers terrain suitable for, Mountain Biking, Ski Touring and Whitewater Paddling. Completing it in a single expedition would be an experience of world class calibre. However, the route is conveniently dissected by roads and towns making much shorter trips possible. Within these sections, the Backbone traveller will find adventure to satisfy any level of ambition, whether that be; strolling the trails of Paradise Meadows, canoeing the rapids of the Nimpkish River or scaling the summit of Victoria Peak.

Following the Vancouver Island Backbone celebrates the spirit of First Nations traders and early European explorers. We can only imagine the journey up the Nimpkish River, hauling canoes and goods across to Tahsis when the land was wild and empty. William Bolton describes such an undertaking in his journal as, initially accompanied by Native guides, he led an expedition traversing the Island from the mouth of the Nimpkish River to Port Alberni in 1896. Bolton's route is now emulated and followed in part by the Backbone Route. However, the land that Bolton knew and that which had been inhabited by the First Nations people is now very different. Logging roads siphon out it's riches and parks preserve it's beauty creating a landscape of incredible contrast.

This route provides a challenge unlike any other long distance hiking trail. To prevent further development and undue pressure on the fragile wilderness, no trails have been cut or even marked, beyond those that already existed. It is hoped this ethic is respected by those following the route in the future, thus helping to preserve this unique experience and landscape.

The Backbone Route crosses several Provincial Parks, and it is especially important to respect the conservation values and development plans for these Parks by passing through leaving no trace. Similar care is needed while hiking through private land on the Beaufort Range and around Buttle Lake. We must ensure future access is not jeopardized by conflicting with the wishes of land owners.

## *How It All Began*

The Vancouver Island Backbone project began in the winter of 1992 from an idea generated by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Mid-Island Branch, in Nanaimo. Roseanne van Schie plotted the early concepts which were eventually realized in the summer of 1993. The WCWC secured funding with help from a grant provided by the Mountain Equipment Co-op to contract the mapping and exploratory work. Philip Stone undertook this work and through that summer hiked some of the lesser known sections, accompanied by various volunteers from the WCWC membership. The information was gathered and has now found itself compiled in this guidebook, the secret is out!

## *How To Get Here*

Scheduled car ferry services operate on the following routes;

Tsawwassen BC –	Schwartz Bay (near Victoria)
Tsawwassen BC –	Nanaimo
Horseshoe Bay BC –	Nanaimo
Seattle WA –	Victoria
Port Angeles WA –	Victoria

Tsawwassen is located south of the city of Vancouver and is the preferred port if you are coming from the USA on Highway 99. Horseshoe Bay is on the north side of Vancouver and is the departure point for traffic on the Trans-Canada (#1) Highway. No reservations are required, service is first come- first across. Long weekends = long line ups!

## *Climate and Seasons*

Vancouver Island lies along the mountainous west Pacific coast of North America. As such its climate is heavily influenced by the meeting of moist Pacific air and drier continental weather systems. Across the Island there are wide variations of weather, in particular in the amount of rainfall. Annual precipitation varies from over 400mm on the west coast to around 150mm on the rain shadowed east coast. During the winter months, this precipitation comes as huge snow falls at alpine elevations (over 1200m/4500ft). A spring snowpack can be as much as 5 metres, taking well into August to melt completely. Summer snow cover can make travel on the Backbone easier in some respects, filling in rocky scree slopes and making fast glissade descents possible. But snow does require some extra equipment, ice axe, gaiters, heavier boots etc.. Check with local stores for advice on the current snow cover and other questions to help you get around.

Generally the best combinations for visiting and travelling on Vancouver Island are; May-June for ski-touring (depending on annual snow cover) and river paddling and, July-September for hiking.

Backcountry travellers have a special duty to familiarize themselves with, and practice strict no trace camping techniques. By leaving the wilderness untouched by our passage we ensure that others who follow will have an experience equal to our own. The very concept of the Vancouver Island Backbone is to provide an unmarked and undeveloped route, beyond the facilities that already exist. Please respect this concept and *do not under any circumstances flag, cairn, or mark the route in any way*. There are many trails on Vancouver Island that are well marked and maintained, and those people following the Backbone are looking for something different.

Please do not light fires, the presence of firepits is unsightly and the collection of firewood places an undue pressure on the fragile alpine ecology. If you do encounter firepits left by those unfamiliar with no-trace ethics, take the time to dismantle them. We must not only ensure our own passage leaves no trace but also take positive action in caring for our diminishing wilderness. Carry a lightweight campstove and use it for cooking. Extreme care must be exercised when lighting stoves and smoking. A forest fire can be devastating, and many fires start each year through carelessness.

Pack out what you pack in and please take the time to remove any garbage left by others. Dispose of all waste with due care to the water supply and do not leave toilet paper or other paper products lying around on the ground. Either pack it out, or carry a small tin can which can be used to burn paper waste in a safe manner.

Vancouver Island is one of the wettest places on Earth and water is rarely far away. The purity of the water supply must be preserved by following some simple measures. Never wash dishes with soap, even the fabled biodegradable soap, nor leave food scraps in fragile alpine lakes. Pack out food waste and learn to cook only enough to eat.

Don't swim in lakes with your skin covered in insect repellent or sun tan lotions. Remember that the alpine is the source and headwaters for all the rivers on the Island and any pollutants left here will affect the entire watershed downstream. Toilet waste should be buried in cat holes far from any water supply. Human coliform bacteria in water is an increasing global problem. At the moment, water on Forbidden Plateau is the only area along the Backbone where treatment or filtration is required. Please help stop the spread of water borne bacteria and disease by defecating responsibly.

One of the easiest ways to minimize impact is to travel in small groups. Groups of five or less provide enough resources for safety in remote areas while keeping traffic and impact to a minimum.

## *Wildlife*

The wildlife on Vancouver Island is unique. Dependant as it is on the animals' ability to cross from mainland British Columbia, the island has developed a strange and unique blend of mammals. There are no Grizzly Bears at all on Vancouver Island nor Rabbits, Chipmunks or Moose. There are however numerous Cougars which are the largest predator and main source of concern for the back-country traveller. Black Bears are common as are Wolves, Roosevelt Elk, Black Tailed Deer and Pine Martens. Rare sightings are made of Vancouver Island Marmots, an endangered species and the mythical Vancouver Island Wolverine.

Should you encounter a large, apparently aggressive animal the best policy is to remain calm and act with a deliberate and confident air. Do not at any cost run from a Cougar, they can confuse this with the actions of their normal prey, deer, and will act accordingly. Hike with a stout stick or ski poles. Cougars occasionally attack domestic dogs and if you plan on having your canine companion accompany you give this serious consideration. Putting things in perspective however, Cougars are very rarely seen. Local hikers covering countless miles across the Island report only a handful or no sightings at all, over many years.

Problems with Bears are also infrequent, the Island lifestyle provides them with an abundance of natural food and they rarely have cause to approach people for food. However this will only remain the case if backcountry travellers take precautions not to attract them in the first place. No fish or meat carried or cooked is a good starting point and always hang food high in a tree, never in your tent. The most likely scenario to encounter a Bear is by accident. In thick vegetation, especially berry bushes, make some noise to alert them to your presence.

Island wildlife is generally shy and elusive if you are fortunate to have a sighting, treasure the moment and remember that you are a visitor in their domain.



## *The Terrain, Vegetation and Other Stings* <sup>13</sup>

The topography of Vancouver Island is very rugged and intricate. While only a handful of the highest summits reach 2100m/7000ft they rise from deep valleys at a mere 225m/700ft. The alpine ridges that much of the Backbone route follows are around 1200m/4500ft. A quick subtraction will show that the vertical rise in crossing from ridge top to ridge top across the valleys can be quite a gain.

The alpine ridges are open, vegetated by heather and other low plants, and are a joy to hike through. This can contrast sharply with the lower forests that vary from open stands of huge timber to thick, shoulder high undergrowth. The key to hiking through this vegetation, where no trail exists, is to find and follow the numerous gametrails that travelling animals create. The wildlife have had the benefit of aeons of experience in figuring out the right path and their trails can save a great deal of effort at times.

It is advisable to have as many of the Information Sources listed as possible, at hand. The complexity and ever changing roads and landscape will require practice and experience navigating to travel successfully through the remote and rugged Island terrain. If visiting the Island for the first time, try one of the less committing sections first, before embarking into more remote areas.

There is no Poison Ivy on the Island but the indigenous Devil's Club fills this void amply. This plant can be readily identified by its 2m/6ft spiny stalks and broad leaves, usually growing in valley floors or creek beds. The spines can produce a nasty rash, and even infections. Needless to say, cross stands of Devil's Club with care. The forest and alpine are also home to untold varieties of mushrooms and fungus. Some are delicacies and strongly recommended. But there are also many toxic species and a positive identification should be made before consuming any of these fungal delights.

From mid-August to the first frosts in late September, nests of Yellow-Jackets and Black Headed Hornets seem to be every where. They build nests in the ground, old stumps and amongst the branches of shrubs and trees. Consider carrying an Epi-pen or Ana-kit with Antihistamine tablets because of the threat of life threatening allergies to their sting. They are rarely a problem for small groups but in a larger party, those at the back.... Watch out!

The tiny Western Black Legged Ticks are active in the lower elevation forest during early spring, March to May but are less common in later summer. They are known to carry Lyme's disease. If one should attach itself to your skin be patient and remove it without leaving its head in your skin. It apparently takes a day or so for Lyme's disease to be transmitted once the tick is attached, so early detection of ticks is important. Symptoms of Lyme's disease are similar to flu initially, if you are in any doubt keep, the tick and take it and your self for testing at a medical facility.

## *Logging Road Travel*

Travelling the Vancouver Backbone requires extensive driving or hitchhiking on gravel logging roads. These are private industrial roads and each company is at pains to point out that travel on these roads is at the individuals own risk. Huge off-road trucks haul immense loads of timber during working hours and must still be anticipated 24 hrs. a day 7 days a week. Yield immediately to these trucks, they cannot and often will not even try to avoid a small car or truck. In this case they quite literally own the road! Before setting out, check your car jack kit is complete and, the air pressure in your spare tire is good. The wise will carry two spare tires.

Current logging road conditions are also important to research. Many valleys have been logged and abandoned years ago and a road marked on a map is no indication of it's driving condition. Logging practices codes in fact now require companies to decommission roads that are no longer active. This means removing bridges and ditching the road. Access may also be restricted on roads that have active logging sites on them it is advisable to respect these restrictions. A simple phone call to the company may save a lot of grief.

It is also worth noting that most rental car companies' insurance policies are void when travelling on gravel roads.



# *Information Sources*

National Topographical Series (NTS) Maps  
Geological Survey of Canada  
Mapping and Publications Division (Vancouver)  
Tel: 604-666-0271

Hiking Trails III  
Central and Northern Vancouver Island  
Seventh Edition 1992  
Published by: Vancouver Island Trails Information Society  
Widely available in outdoor stores on the Island and in Vancouver.

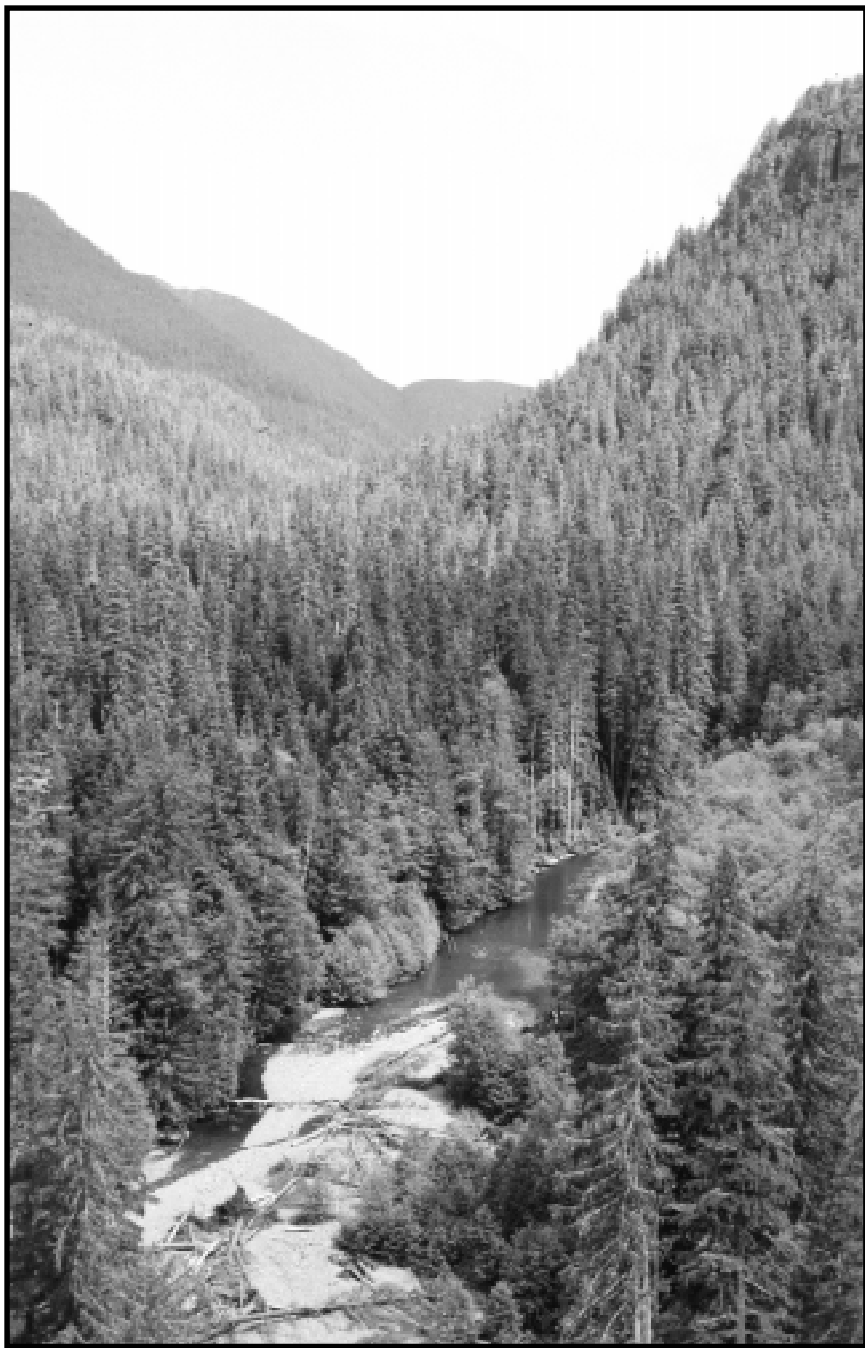
Recreation and Logging Road Guide  
to Alberni Valley and surrounding area. East Map  
Published by: MacMillan Bloedel Ltd.  
Tel: 604-287-5000 (Menzies Bay Division)

Logging and Highway Road Map  
of Campbell River, Sayward, Oyster River and Buttle Lake Area  
Published by: Campbell River Search and Rescue Society  
Box 705, Campbell River, BC V9W 6J3  
Tel: 604-923-2500

Recreation and Logging Road Guide to Forest Lands of Western Vancouver Island  
Published by  
Western Woodlands Division of Pacific Forest Products Ltd. (Avenor) Tahsis  
Pacific Region  
Tel: 604-283-2261

Whitewater Trips for Kayakers Canoeists and Rafters  
on Vancouver Island  
Betty Pratt-Johnson  
Published by: Gordon Soules

Vancouver Island Route Cards  
Published by: Alpine Pacific Images  
PO Box 482, Heriot Bay, BC V0P 1H0  
Tel: 604 -334-1959



*Looking over the Upper Gold River in to the Elbow Creek valley in June 1993, prior to logging road construction.*

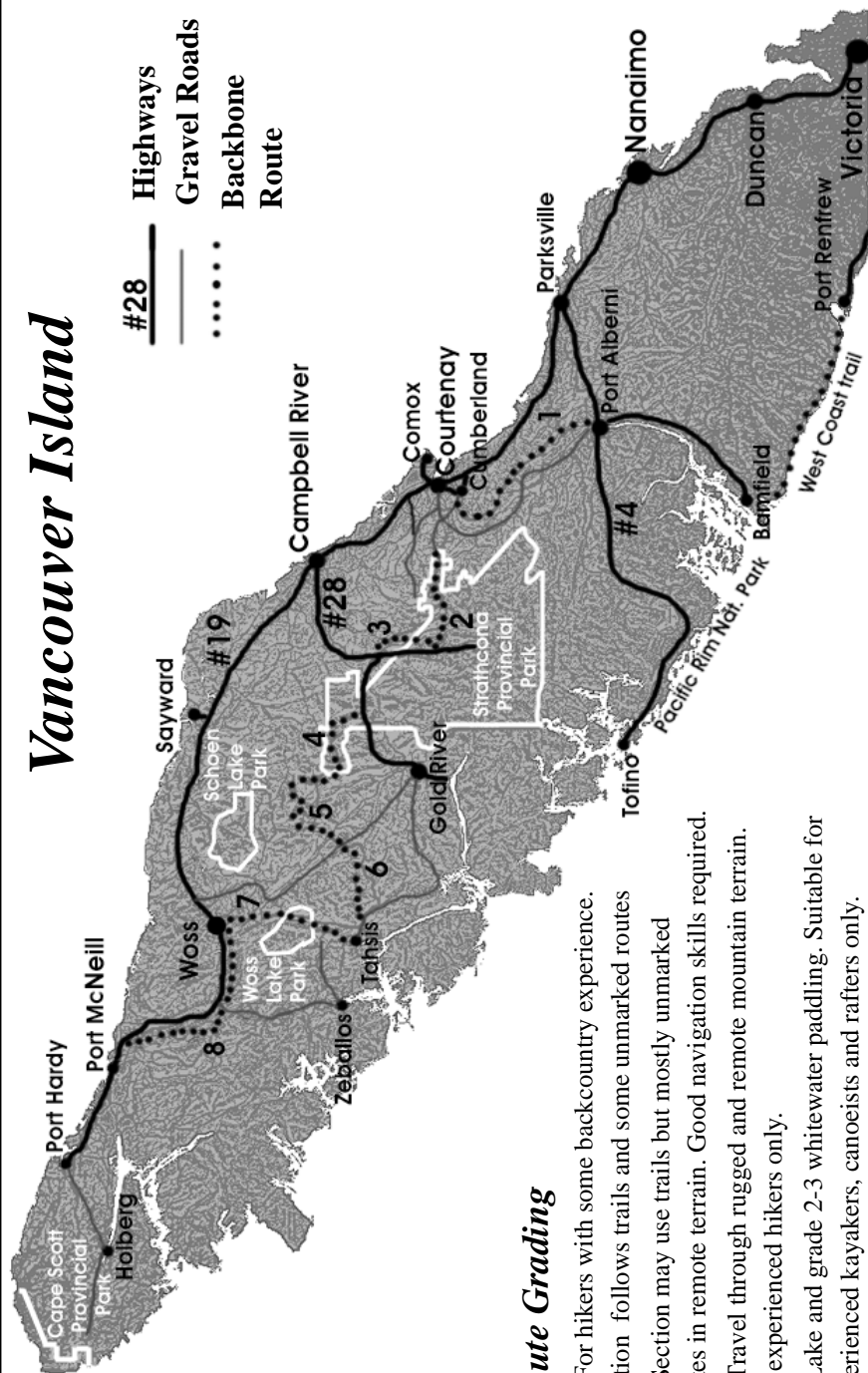
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# The Route



# Vancouver Island

#28      Highways  
 —      Gravel Roads  
 .....      Backbone  
 Route



## Route Grading

- A** For hikers with some backcountry experience. Section follows trails and some unmarked routes
- B** Section may use trails but mostly unmarked routes in remote terrain. Good navigation skills required.
- C** Travel through rugged and remote mountain terrain. For experienced hikers only.
- P** Lake and grade 2-3 whitewater paddling. Suitable for experienced kayakers, canoeists and rafters only.

# The Route By Sections: See above for grading definitions.

1-Beaufort Range, Port Alberni to Cumberland ; 55km/32mi **B**

2- Forbidden Plateau, Cumberland to Augerpoint at Buttle Lake; 36km/22mi **A**

3- Buttle Lake, Augerpoint to Buttle Narrows; 30km/20mi **B**

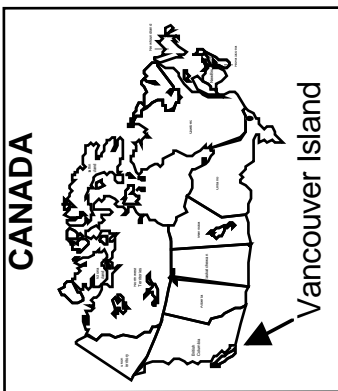
4- Gold Lake, Crest mountain to Gold Lake; 28km/18mi **C**

5- Victoria Peak, Gold Lake to Nimpkish Road; 31km/20mi **C**


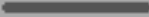






6- Tlupana Range, Nimpkish Road to Tahsis; 40km/25mi **C**

7- Woss Lake, Tahsis to Woss; 35km/22mi **B**

8- Nimpkish River, Woss to Port McNeill; 65km/40mi **P**



# Map Key

	Paved highways
	Logging/gravel roads
	Cities and towns
	Maintained trails
	Hiking route, no trail
	Mountain peaks
	Camping
	Lakes and rivers
3	Reference to Route Notes

**Measurement units:** there is a mix of metric and imperial measurements on the various Canadian National Topographic Series maps (NTS). The most recent sheets have 40m contour intervals with 1 km grid squares, others have 100ft or 20m contour intervals. When reading the text, measurements are given in either both metric and imperial units, or in the standard of the relevant map sheet. Grid references are in standard 6 figure format, remember; eastings first.

# *Beaufort Range* <sup>21</sup>

**From Port Alberni on to the Beaufort Range and northward to historic Cumberland.**

**Length:** approximately 55km from Stamp Falls Park (Port Alberni) to Cumberland.

**Time:** 4-7 days

**Required NTS Maps:** 92 F/7 Horne Lake, 92 F/6 Great Central Lake, 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau

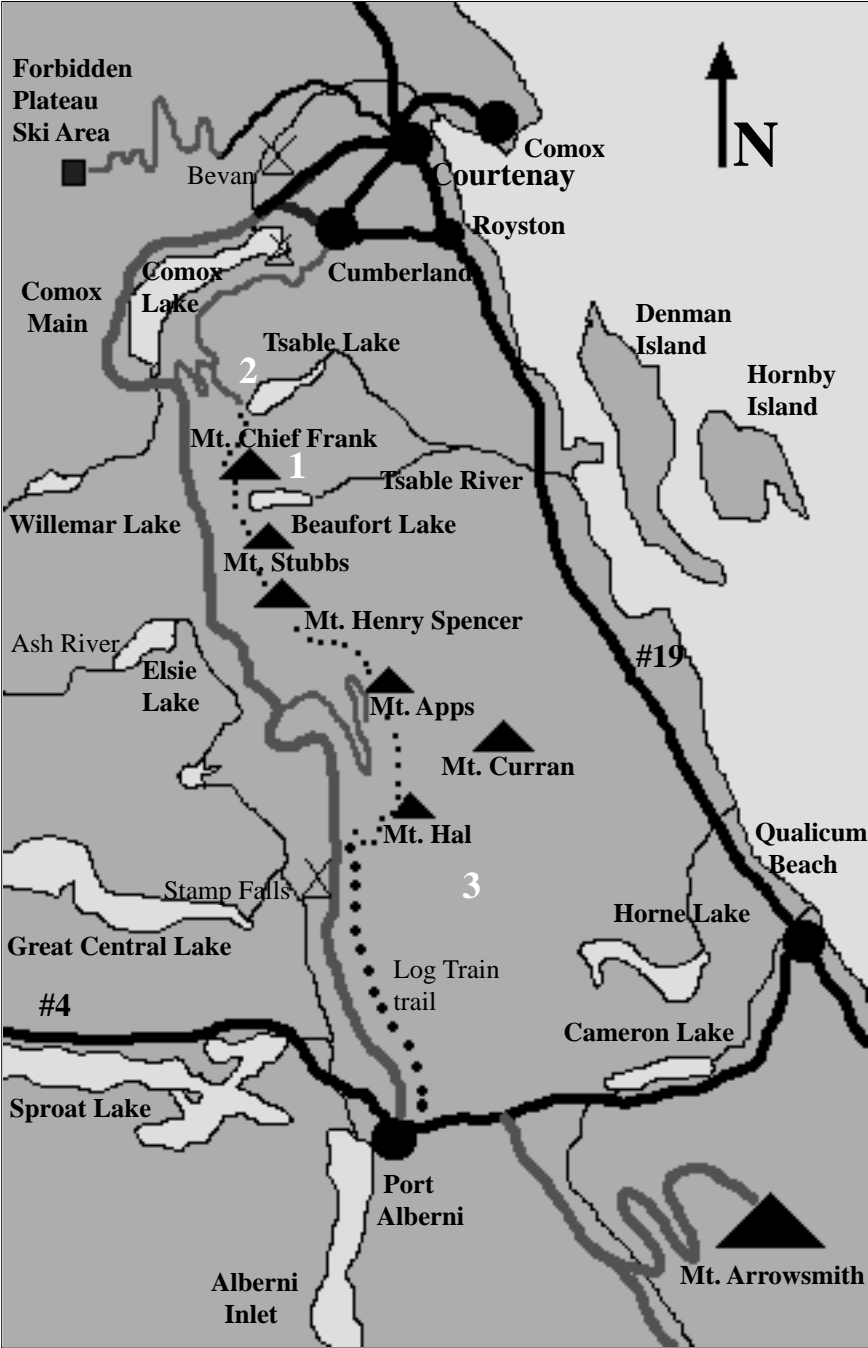
**Synopsis:** The Beaufort Range stands as a single continuous ridgeline of sub-alpine mountains above the east coast of southern Vancouver Island. To the west are the Ash and Puntledge Rivers, draining high peaks and glaciers in Strathcona Park. While to the east is the Georgia Strait, the sea which divides Vancouver Island from the BC mainland. The Backbone Route climbs onto this range at the south end near Port Alberni and follows it north to the village of Cumberland.

The Log Train trail follows an old railway grade from Port Alberni along the base of the range from where several logging road systems head up the slopes toward the ridge crest.

Some of these roads are maintained, giving vehicle access quite close to the alpine. Once on the ridge, the route keeps to the narrow height of land over; Mt. Apps, Mt. Stubbs and, Mt. Chief Frank. Although in places the ridge may only be several metres wide it rarely becomes rocky or exposed. It is an excellent introduction to hiking off-trail in the Vancouver Island mountains.

Toward the north end above Comox Lake, the range begins dropping gradually down to valley level. North from Tsable Lake, logging roads can be followed right down in to Cumberland. These roads can be in very poor driving condition but are manageable with some 4x4s. Other roads lead down to join the Valley Connector at the south end of Comox Lake.

*Beaufort Range Overview*



**Amenities:** Camping is available at Stamp Falls Provincial Park in Port Alberni and Cumberland Lake Campground on Comox Lake. There is a hostel at Bevan just north of Cumberland, it is unfortunately awkward to reach without a vehicle.

**Access Points:** From Port Alberni via logging roads on the west flank of the Beaufort Range. Logging roads also come up all the major watersheds on the eastern flank and although they are a much longer route to lower elevation, do eventually reach the Island Highway #19. Old roads also come onto the range from Cumberland at the north end.

## **Route Notes:**

- 1** On Mt. Chief Frank care is required on the north side of this peak in scrambling alongside a steep creek, between the summit and the pass with Mt. Clifton. Rock is not difficult but can be wet and is exposed.
- 2** A small row boat may be found on the shore of Tsable Lake. Crossing the lake by boat can save a long bushwack around, but the boat should be left on the north (road) side as it is often needed by people fishing.
- 3** Take note that map sheet 92 F/7 Horne Lake has 20 metre contour intervals unlike the adjacent sheets which are the usual 40 metres. This map gives the impression you're in the Himalayas compared to the surrounding terrain!

# *Forbidden Plateau*

**From Wood Mountain Ski Park, across Forbidden Plateau to Mt. Albert Edward and on to Buttle Lake.**

**Length:** 36km from Forbidden Plateau Ski Area (Wood Mountain) to the top of the Augerpoint (Jack's) trail.

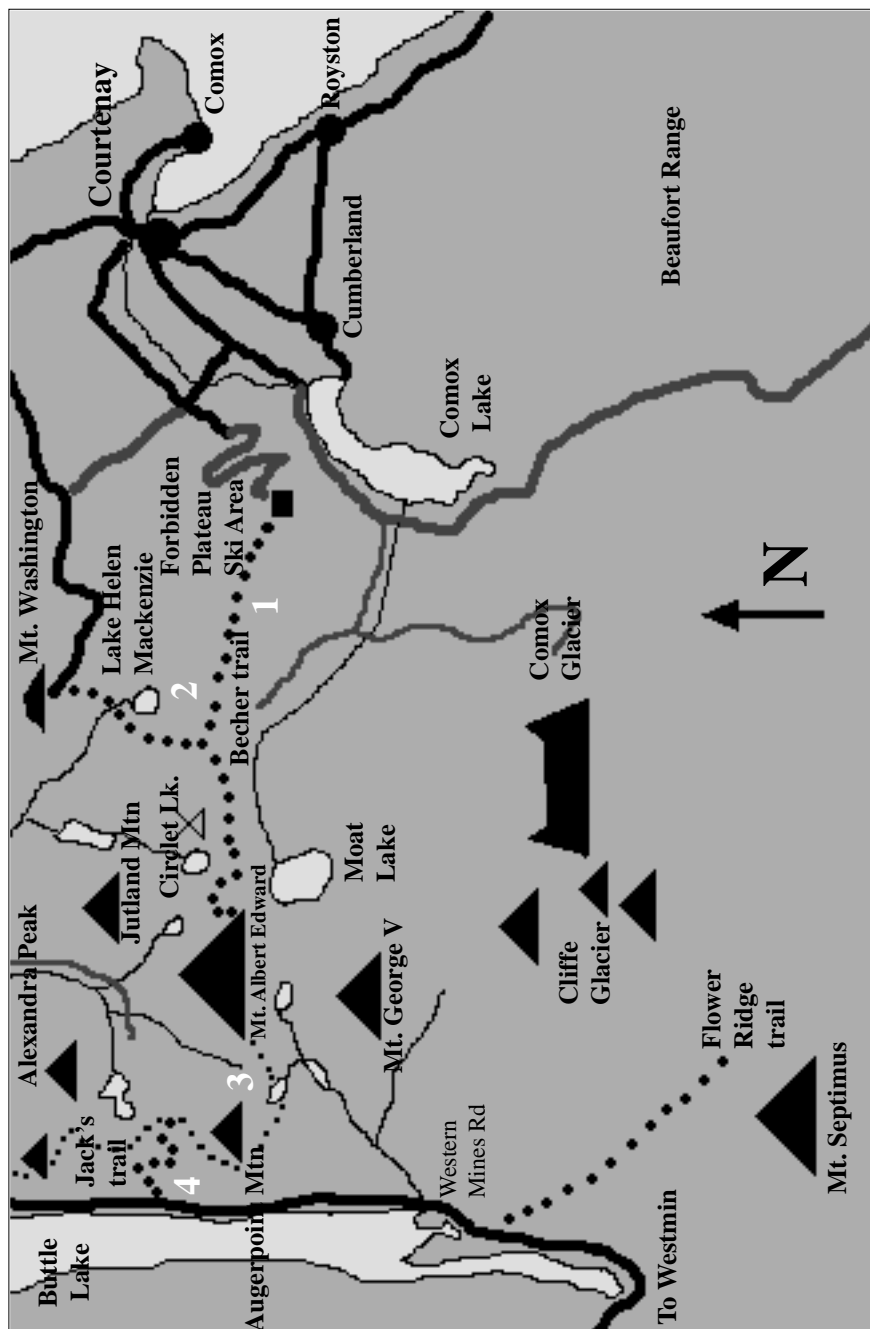
**Time:** 3-6 days

**Required NTS Maps:** 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau, 92 F/12 Buttle Lake.

**Synopsis:** Already a popular hiking area, with an extensive trail network linking Forbidden Plateau (Wood Mountain) Ski Area to Paradise Meadows and Mt. Washington. The trails cross sub-alpine forest over rolling terrain on the Plateau before rising dramatically up to Mt. Albert Edward.

Despite it's appearance, the hiking route over Mt. Albert Edward is very straight forward, well marked and well travelled. Mt. Albert Edward is one of the highest peaks on Vancouver Island and has outstanding views of the Georgia Strait and Strathcona Park. From the summit, the route becomes less distinct as it drops down the South West Ridge toward Ruth Master's Lake. A short climb up from the lake, skirting the side of Augerpoint leads to a ridge overlooking Buttle Lake's east shore with spectacular views up and down the lake.

The Augerpoint or Jack's trail drops down the hillside to Western Mines road along Buttle Lake. This route is quite easy to follow with a trail of red paint sprayed on rocks and trees.



**Amenities:** Camping is allowed only at designated sites across the Plateau, those being at; Circlet Lake, Kwai Lake, Douglas Lake and Lake Helen Mackenzie. The closest campsites to the Augerpoint trailhead are at Ralph River and Buttle Narrows.

**Access Points:** By road to Forbidden Plateau (Wood Mountain) Ski Area. There is only sporadic traffic for hitch hiking during the summer. There is also road access to Mt. Washington Resort which sees much more traffic. Logging road access in the Oyster River on the Oyster River Main. At the west end, Western Mines Road follows the east shore of Buttle Lake.

## **Route Notes:**

**1** Camping on Forbidden Plateau is only permitted at designated sites, Douglas Lake, Kwai Lake, Lake Helen Mackenzie and Circlet Lake. This regulation is necessary because of the high number of visitors in this area. It is enforced by Park Rangers and is best adhered to.

**2** There is a BC Park's cabin in the pass above and just to the south of Lake Helen Mackenzie. It is not for public use and should not be entered without the specific permission of a Ranger. In the event of an emergency the Rangers at the cabin may be able to provide assistance.

**3** Between Mt. Albert Edward and the alpine ridge at the top of the Augerpoint trail, the hiking route is less well defined and not maintained to the same standard as the trails on the Plateau. Please don't add to the numerous cairns already on the summit of Mt. Albert Edward.

**4** The Augerpoint trailhead on Western Mines Road is not sign-posted. At the time of writing it is marked by a large blue arrow spray-painted on the asphalt, approximately 500m north of the Augerpoint Day Area parking lot which is clearly marked.

# *Buttle Lake*

**Following the divide along the east side of Buttle Lake, north from the Augerpoint (Jack's) trail to Buttle Narrows via Mt. Adrian and Roger's Ridge.**

**Length:** approximately 30km from Augerpoint trailhead to Buttle Narrows.

**Time:** 3-5 days

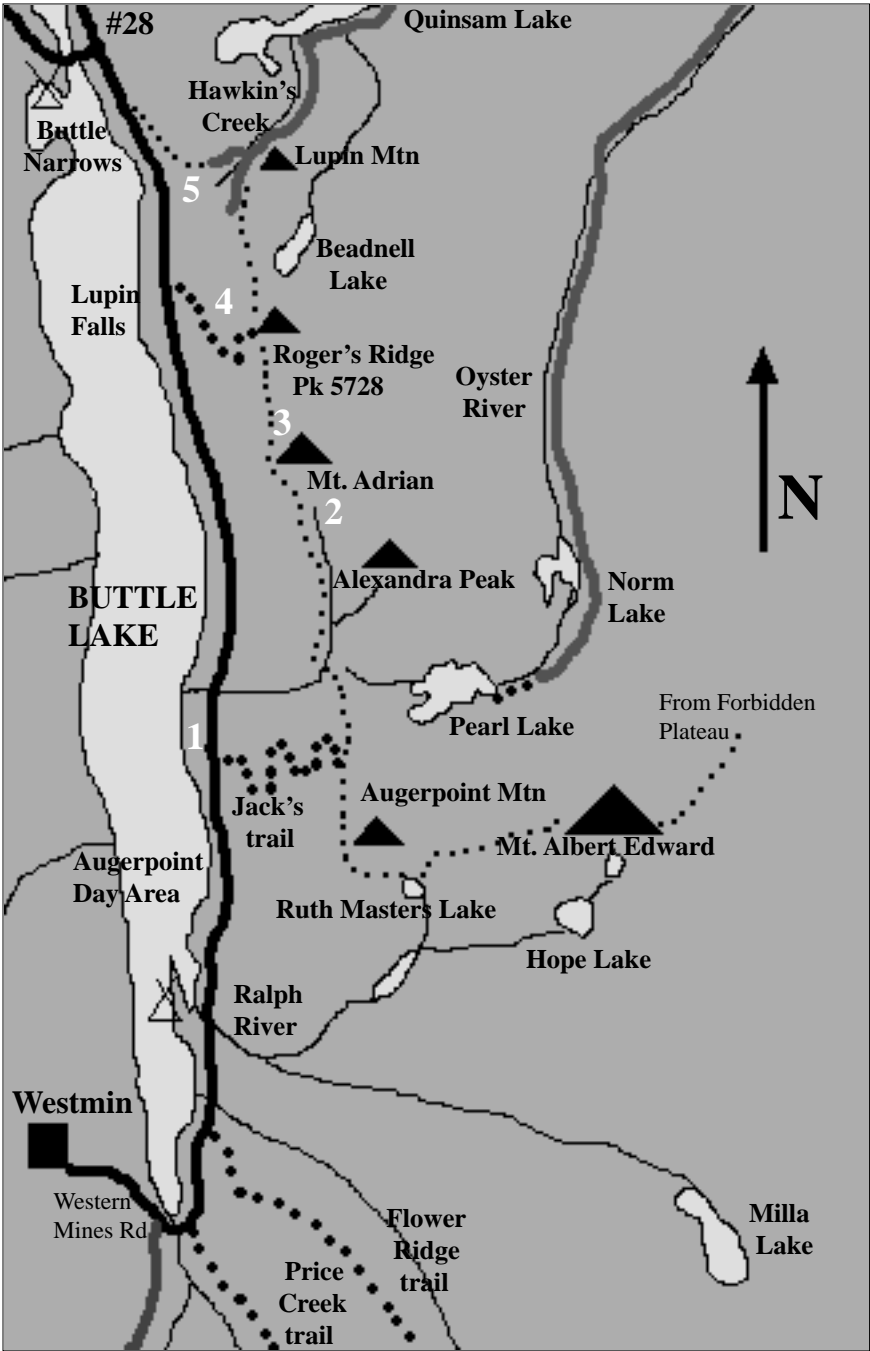
**Required NTS maps:** 92 F/12 Buttle Lake,  
92 F/13 Upper Campbell Lake.

**Synopsis:** This section of the backbone is noted for it's superb panoramas of the Georgia Strait and the mountains of Strathcona Park. Starting initially within the park on the unmarked Augerpoint trail the route climbs on to the ridge crest above the east shore of Buttle Lake. The ridge runs northward and soon leaves the Park boundary to cross private timber holdings. The route descends into a sub alpine valley near Pearl Lake, which can be reached as a short side trip, before climbing up once more, onto Mt. Adrian. Alexandra Peak is also a worth while detour for it's views down the Oyster River and of Desolation Sound.

From Mt. Adrian, continue north on the ridge crest passing a rocky cliff band and on to Roger's Ridge. It is possible to descend the Roger's Ridge trail to Lupin Falls on Buttle Lake or carry on toward Lupin Mountain and drop in to Hawkin's Creek. Follow logging roads west to Hawkin's Pass, overlooking Buttle Narrows, and descend the bluffly slope to Western Mines Road.

**Amenities:** Provincial campsites can be found at Ralph River and Buttle Narrows in Strathcona Park. Accommodation is available at Strathcona Park Lodge 7km north of Buttle Narrows on Highway #28. Full services at Campbell River and Gold River.

*Buttle Lake Overview*



**Access Points:** By road from Buttle Lake on Western Mines Road for the Augerpoint trail, Roger's Ridge trail and Hawkin's Pass. Logging roads in Oyster River and Hawkin's Creek.

## **Route Notes:**

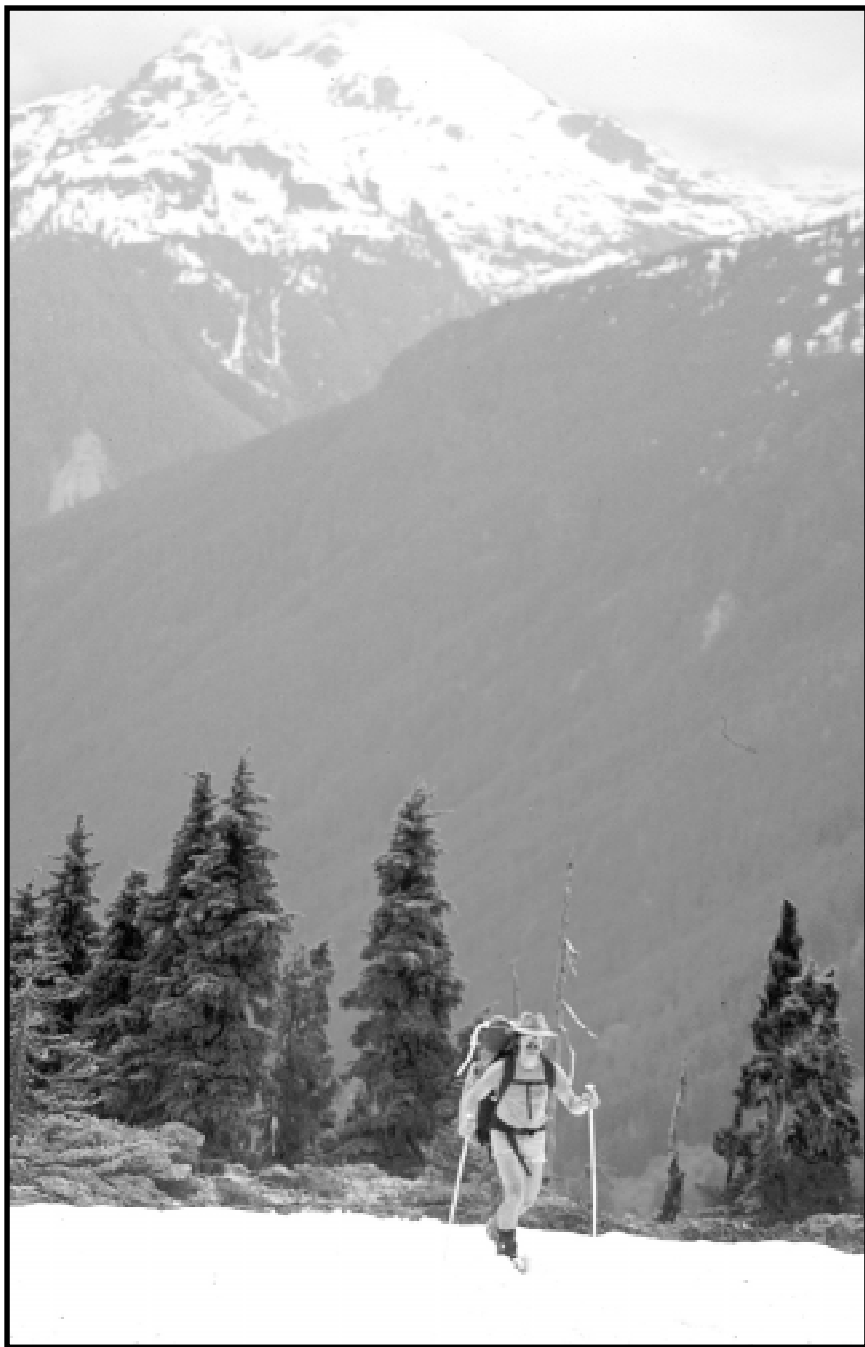
**1** The Augerpoint trailhead on Western Mines Road is not sign-posted. At the time of writing it is marked by a large blue arrow spray-painted on the asphalt, approximately 500m north of the Augerpoint Day Area parking lot which is clearly marked.

**2** Climbing up on to Mt. Adrian, the best route is to go through a narrow pass between Mt. Adrian and a group of rocky turrets to it's south. Either hike over the peak or traverse across the west flank (can be exposed to avalanche in early spring or other snowy periods).

**3** Care is need in passing a rocky cliff band that straddles the ridge between Mt. Adrian and Roger's Ridge (Peak 5728). A wide steep gully is one option toward the west end of the cliff, or making an exposed traverse around it on the east end.

**4** The Roger's Ridge trailhead is not signposted on Western Mines Road but is easy to find as it starts up an old logging road 100m south of the Lupin Falls Day Area parking lot. It is similarly tricky to find the top in the alpine to descend the trail, look for a cluster of tiny lakes immediately west and 750ft below Roger's Ridge. The rough upper part of the trail is flagged down to the point where it joins the old logging road.

**5** Logging roads cut high across the North west flanks of Lupin Mountain, linking with the pass at the end of Hawkin's Creek. Between the pass and Western Mines Road along Buttle Lake, the terrain is bluffy and scrubby second growth. The best line is to link the pockets of larger old growth trees across the slope. Avoid any temptation to head toward Quinsam Lake.



*Craig Maxwell hiking north of Augerpoint above Buttle Lake.*

# *Gold Lake*

**From Crest Mountain northward along the Heber-Salmon divide via Mt. Judson to Gold Lake.**

**Length:** approximately 22km from Highway #28 to the east shore of Gold Lake. ~6km either direction on the Gold Lake trail to trailheads.

**Time:** 2-4 days

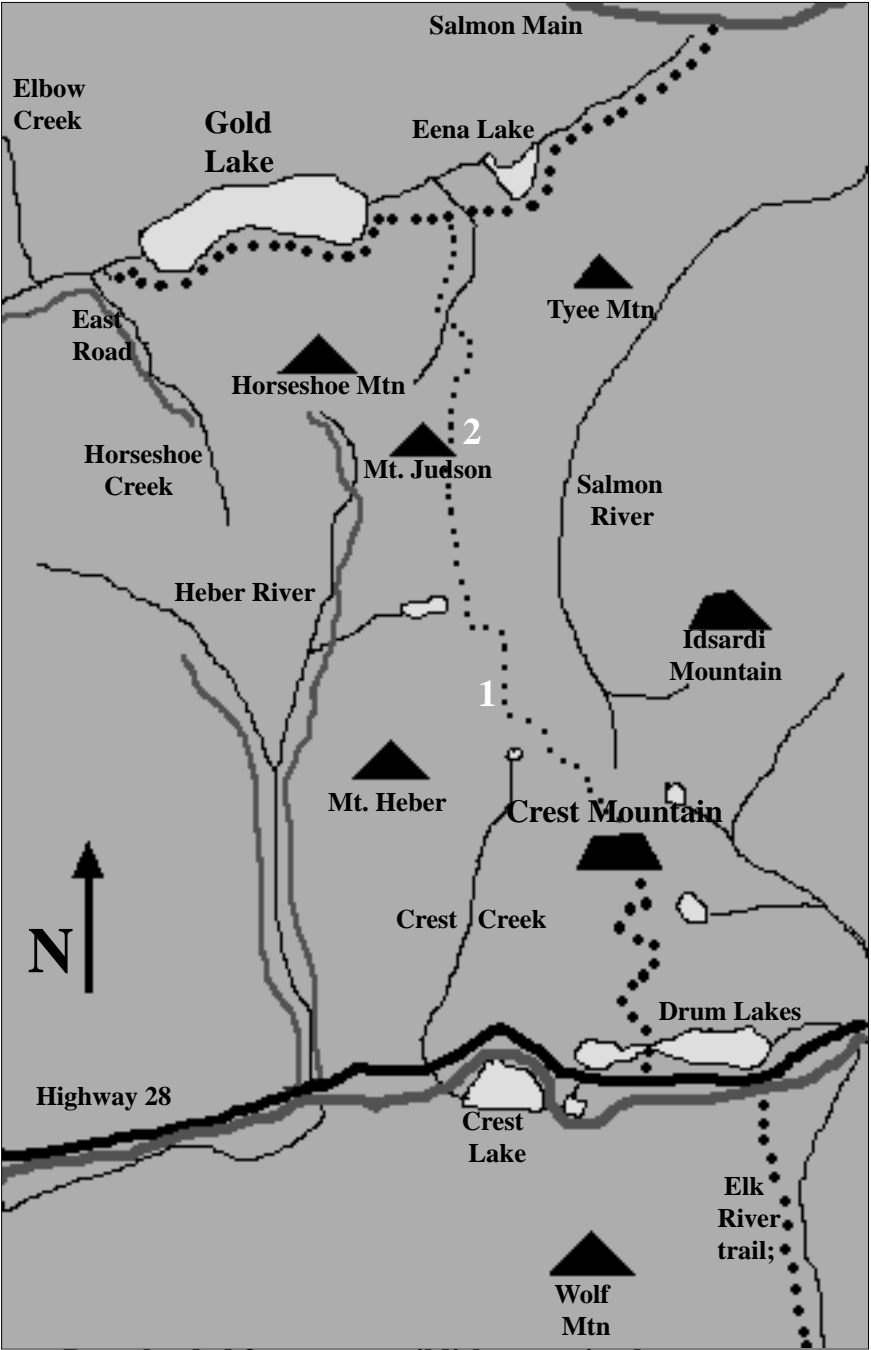
**Required NTS maps:** 92 F/13 Upper Campbell Lake

**Synopsis:** This section of the Backbone begins on the Crest Mountain trail, reached from Highway 28 near the west boundary of Strathcona Park. The trail climbs up on to the gentle alpine plateau on top of the mountain. Once on the plateau, the trail ends and the route heads north, descending slightly to the three watershed pass between Idsardi Creek, Crest Creek and the Salmon River. Dropping into the timber a careful traverse is needed to reach a pass between the Salmon and Heber Rivers just south of Mt. Judson. The route continues north over Mt. Judson keeping to the height of land and then drops north west in to the upper Gold River and on to Gold Lake.

A trail around the lake links two logging road systems; the Salmon River Main which leads east to the Island Highway and Campbell River and the misleadingly named East Road which heads west to join Nimpkish Road and the town of Gold River.

**Amenities:** There are few amenities close to this area of Strathcona Park. A walk in campsite has been proposed at Crest Lake but at the time of writing has not yet materialized. The town of Gold River is 25km west of the Crest Mountain trailhead where full services can be found including campsites. The closest Provincial campground is at Buttle Narrows near the junction with Western Mines Road and the highway 28 bridge over Buttle Narrows. There is a designated campground on the east shore of Gold Lake.

Gold Lake Overview



**Access Points:** By road on Highway 28 to the Crest Mountain trailhead. Logging road access to the east Gold Lake trailhead on the Salmon River Main from Menzies Bay, north of Campbell River. Access to the west Gold Lake trailhead is on East Road which branches off Nimpkish Road at two points; immediately 3 km north of Gold River at the Gold River bridge and also ~10 km north of Gold River on branch M21. A current logging road map will be essential for this section. Traffic on either of these logging road systems cannot be relied on for hitchhiking.

### **Route Notes:**

**1** Care is needed navigating while traversing from the Crest Creek/Salmon River pass around the north side of Mt. Heber to the Heber/Salmon pass. An altimeter would be an asset as timber obscures much of a view.

**2** The terrain over Mt. Judson is steep in places and can be difficult in spring or other snowy conditions. Another alternative is to hike through the Salmon River using a low pass north of Mt. Judson to enter or leave the Upper Gold River.

# *Victoria Peak*

**From near Gold Lake through the Elbow Creek, passing Victoria Peak to the Upper White River, Alston Creek and the Nimpkish valley.**

**Length:** approximately 31km from Gold Lake trailhead on East Road to Nimpkish Road.

**Time:** 4-6 days

**Required NTS maps:** 92 E/16 Gold River,  
92 L/1 Schoen Lake

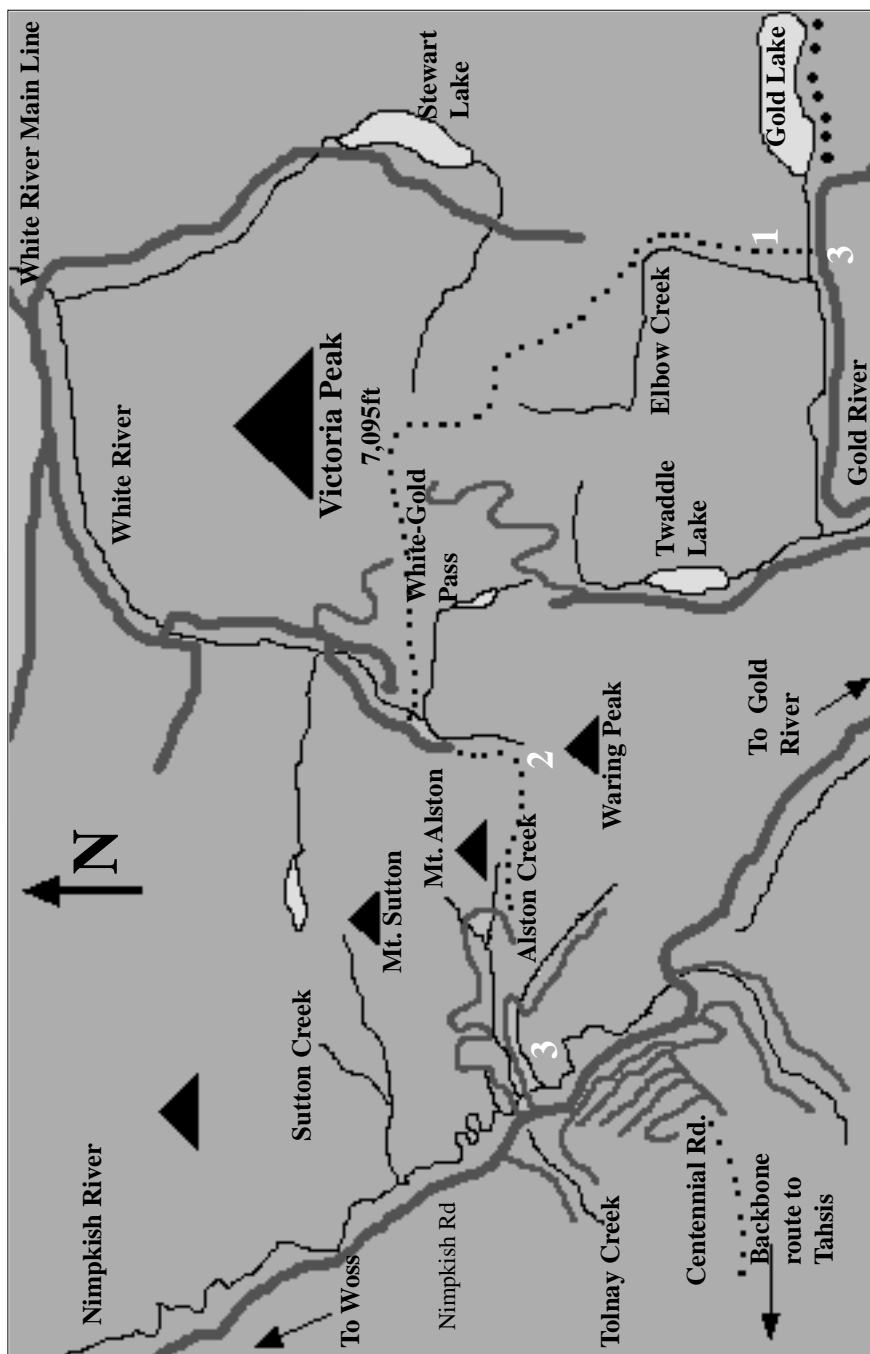
**Synopsis:** The starting point for this section will depend on the current extent of logging road development in Elbow Creek. From Elbow Creek the route climbs on to the north divide of the valley and follows this alpine ridge to meet the south ridge of Victoria Peak. The summit of Victoria Peak is climbed with only slight technical difficulty. It is reached by following the south ridge to the “Gap” then dropping around to the south face of the mountain and climbing directly from the snowfield.

The Backbone continues by descending south westward to the White-Gold Pass, then on to logging roads in the Upper White River. Roads are also under construction in the Upper White and these should be followed in to the timber before climbing through the gentlest of several gnarly little passes in to Alston Creek.

Logging roads in Alston Creek wind down to join Nimpkish Road. Because of the remote access, this section is best done together with the Gold Lake section, or with two vehicles so that one can be left at the end point.

**Amenities:** There is little in the way of amenities around this section. There is a designated campsite with no facilities on the east shore of Gold Lake and a Forest Service campground at Muchalet Lake with basic facilities. Full Services can be found in the town of Gold River including campgrounds.

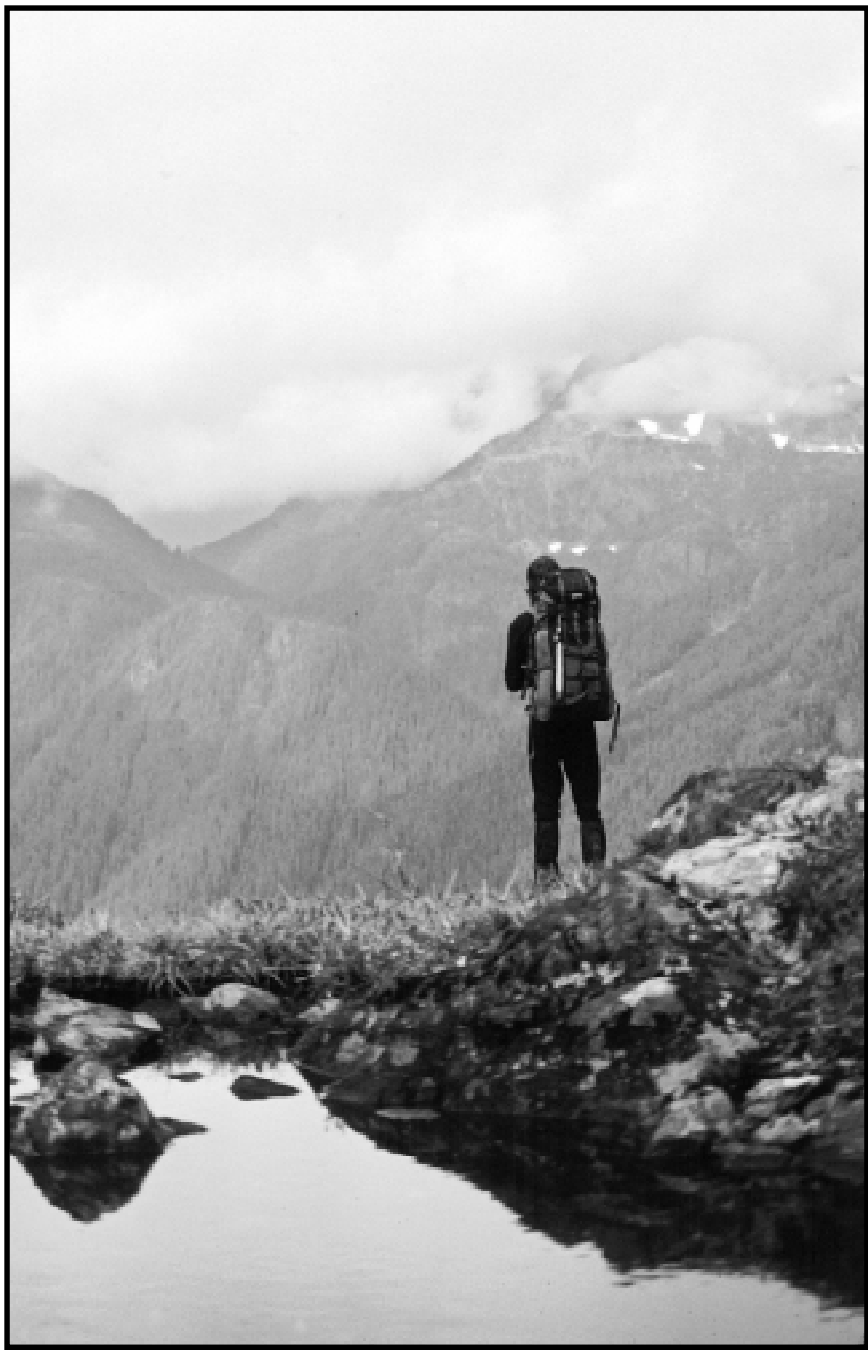
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**Access:** Logging road access to the west side of Gold Lake and Elbow Creek is on East Road which branches off Nimpkish Road at two points; immediately 3 km north of Gold River at the Gold River bridge and also ~10 km north of Gold River on branch M21. At the west end you arrive on Nimpkish Road which can be travelled south to Gold River or north to Woss and the Island Highway #19. It is a gravel road but is well travelled. Other logging roads enter the area from near Sayward up the White River and Consort Creek. A current logging road map will be essential for this section.

### **Route Notes:**

- 1** Logging roads are just being built in Elbow Creek at the time of writing and will likely extend throughout the valley eventually. Their extent will determine the starting point at that end of the section.
- 2** There are several small passes that link the Upper White River to Alston Creek to the north west of Waring Peak. They are steep and exposed from the White River side and the best of the options is the pass at grid reference 9941 close to the head of the valley.
- 3** Because of the road logistics of this section it may be necessary to have a second vehicle to leave at one end or the other before setting out. Alternatively combine the section with the Gold Lake section, arriving or finishing either on Nimpkish Road or Highway 28 where hitchhiking is possible.



*John Roberts on the south ridge of Victoria Peak looking over the White River valley.*

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# *Thupana Range*

**From Nimpkish River-Gold River Pass westward along Muchalet-Sebalhall divide to Peter Lake, Perry River and Tahsis.**

**Length:** approximately 40 kilometres from Nimpkish Road to Perry Lake on the Head Bay Forest Road.

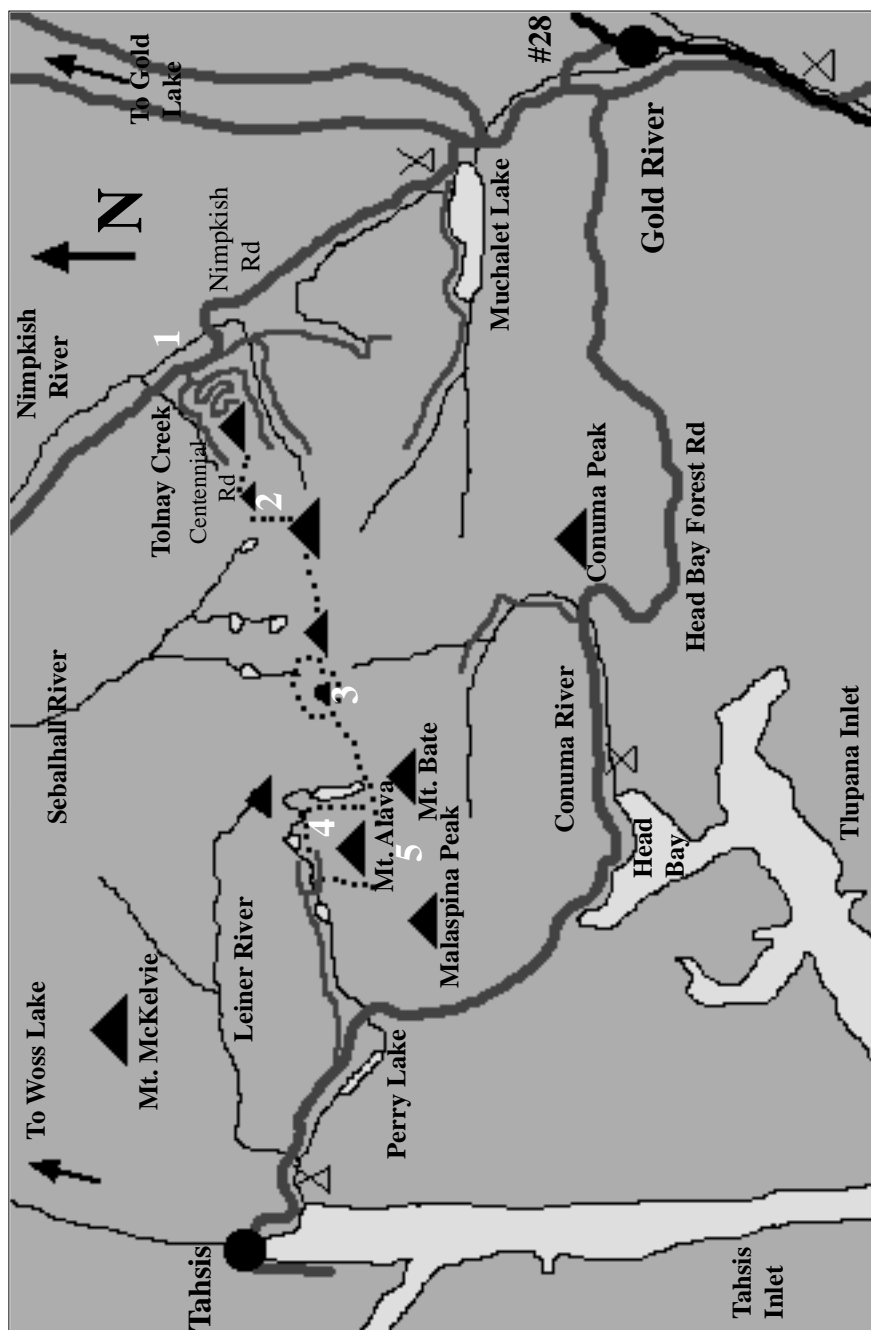
**Time:** 6-9 days

**Required NTS maps:** 92 E/16 Gold River,  
92 E/15 Zeballos

**Synopsis:** Probably the most remote and rugged section of the Backbone Route. From Nimpkish Road in the Nimpkish River valley, the route climbs on to and follows the Tolnay Creek-Upper Kla-anch divide west. It passes the headwaters of the Muchalet, Sebalhall and Conuma Rivers. This divide joins the high mountains of the Thupana Range at the Sebalhall/Conuma Pass. A long ridge climbs up into the rocky and exquisite terrain around Mt. Bate. These mountains are some of the least explored on the Island and are contained by the largest alpine area outside Strathcona Park. They are also notable for the views of Nootka Sound and the west coast.

The Backbone Route skirts the shore of Peter Lake from where two route options link with the Perry River logging roads. Either battling with the Perry River canyon or climbing high over Mt. Alava. Once down in the Perry valley logging roads lead out to join the road to Tahsis near Perry Lake. No established or maintained trails at any point.

**Amenities:** Full services available in Gold River and Tahsis. Forest Service campsites at Muchalet Lake (11 km north of Gold River) and Leiner River (2km east of Tahsis).



**Access Points:** Starting point in the Nimpkish valley is Centennial Road reached along Nimpkish Road either from ~30km north of Gold River or ~35km south of Highway 19 from near Woss. From Tahsis the access is ~12km south west on the Head Bay Forest Road on branch P15 in the Perry River valley. Logging roads also come close to points of this section in the Muchalet River, Sebalhall Creek and Conuma River.

## **Route Notes:**

- 1** At the east end, in the Nimpkish valley, it is important to start up the correct ridge on to the southernmost of two knolls at grid reference 922367 and not up to the northern knoll at grid reference 374922. Although the terrain on the map would suggest that they link, a landslide between them completely isolates the northern knoll requiring retracing back to the road again.
- 2** The granite knoll at grid reference 9034 is easily bypassed on the south west side on bushy gametrails.
- 3** The domelike knoll at grid reference 8432 must be bypassed on the north side by dropping down to the logging roads in the Sebalhall valley. The wide gully on this side cannot be reached with a straight traverse from the Sebalhall/Conuma Pass. The best route is around it's south side on the Conuma River side.
- 4** The canyon between Alava Lake and the logging roads in the Perry River is very bushy and hard going. Keep to the right (north) side at first, crossing to the left bank lower down. A longer but more pleasant alternative is to climb around the east side of Mt. Alava, with some hunting locate a gully off it's south ridge to the round dome at grid reference 7829. Immediately south of this dome, a steep creek drops north to join the Perry River roads.
- 5** Mt. Bate and Mt. Alava are incorrectly marked on the NTS map sheet. Both are the high points north west of those indicated on the map.

# *Woss Lake*

**Following Tahsis River north from Tahsis to Woss Lake, skirting the east shore or boating the lake to Woss.**

**Length:** approximately 35km from Tahsis to Woss

**Time:** 3-4 days

**Required NTS maps:** 92 E/15 Zeballos

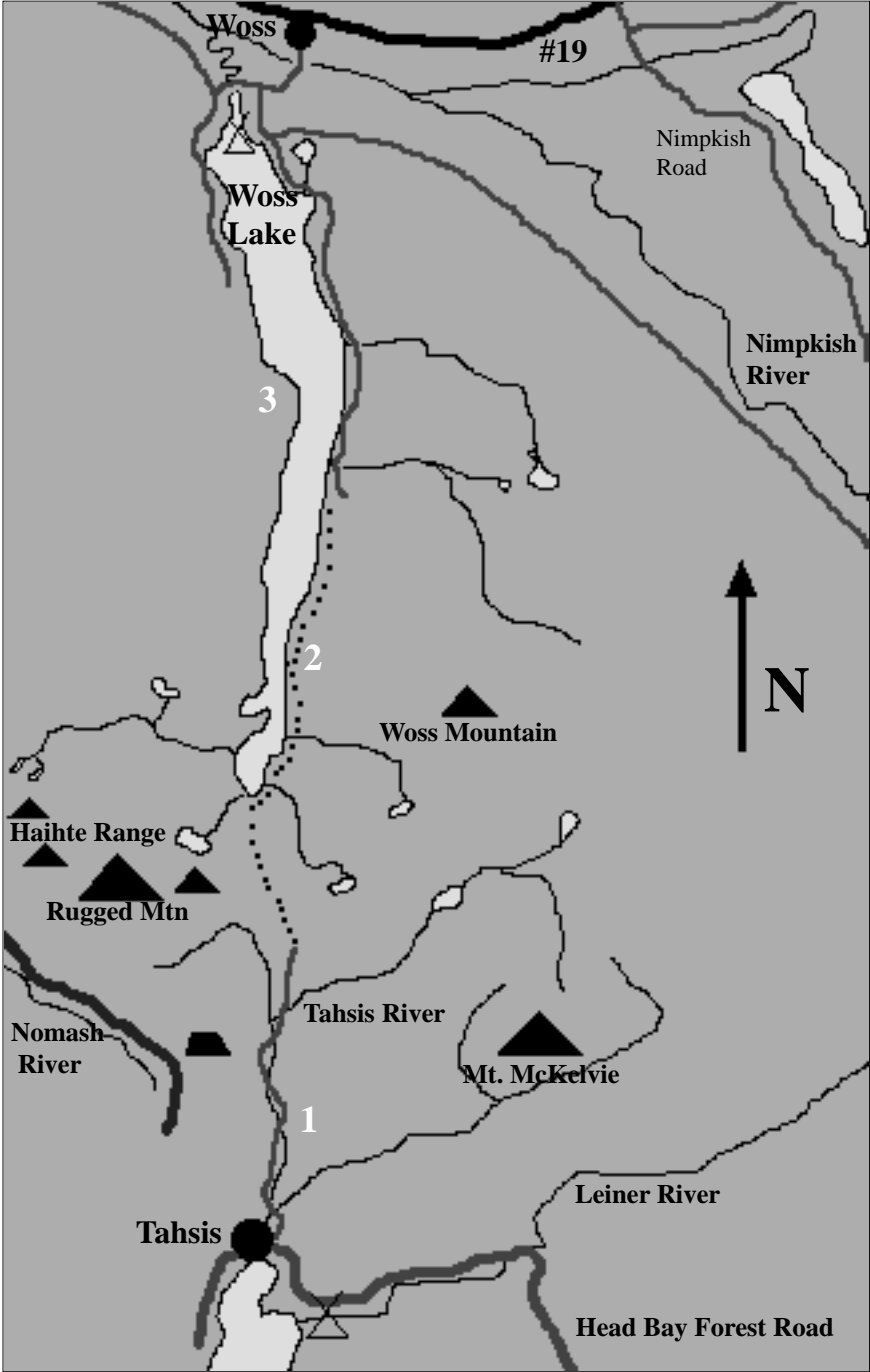
92 L/2 Woss Lake

**Synopsis:** Geographically speaking this is the easiest section to describe. From Tahsis, the route follows an abandoned logging road north along the Tahsis River. The old road crosses the river several times and the state of these crossings should be treated as unknown. After leaving the end of the road, the route continues north through bluffy scrub forest to a pass above Woss Lake. A gradual descent weaving through these rocky bluffs and thick bush leads to the shore of the lake. This route has been travelled by surveyors, prospectors etc. and there are several flagged routes and rough paths in places.

Following an over grown First Nations trade trail the route skirts through the timber along the east shore of Woss Lake, joining a logging road about half way along the lake. The road goes directly to the small community of Woss on the Island Highway.

**Amenities:** Full services are available in Tahsis although it is a small town and opening hours may be found limited. Woss is a very small community but does have a combination gas station, restaurant and general store. Forest Service campgrounds are at Leiner River 2 km east of Tahsis and on Woss Lake ~3km south of Woss. The south end of Woss Lake and the Haihte Range has recently been designated a Provincial Park but as yet no development plans for park facilities has been announced.

Woss Lake Overview



**Access Points:** At the south end, access is right out of Tahsis which is reached along the gravel Head Bay Forest road 60km from Gold River. At the north end, Woss is on the Island Highway #19 and Woss Lake is reached on the gravel Woss Road which runs down the east shore of the lake. A road link between Tahsis and Zeballos has recently been surveyed but no construction date has yet been set.

### **Route Notes:**

- 1** The condition of the old Tahsis River logging road is very poor. The condition of the bridges is unknown and river crossings are dangerous in high water.
- 2** The route around the east shore of Woss Lake is bluffy and bushy. The remnants of an old First Nations trade route, the Oolichan trail, still exist but is largely overgrown. Arranging boats at the south end of the lake would be an alternative to hiking the lake shore. As with all large lakes be wary of high winds and waves in small craft.
- 3** There are some old First Nations tree carvings and pictographs around Woss Lake. Please respect these beautiful examples of Native heritage by leaving them completely undisturbed.

# *Nimpkish River*

**Following the Nimpkish River from Woss downstream to Nimpkish Lake and to Port McNeill**

**Length:** approximately 65km/45mi from Woss to the Highway 19 bridge near Port McNeill.

**Time:** 2-5 days

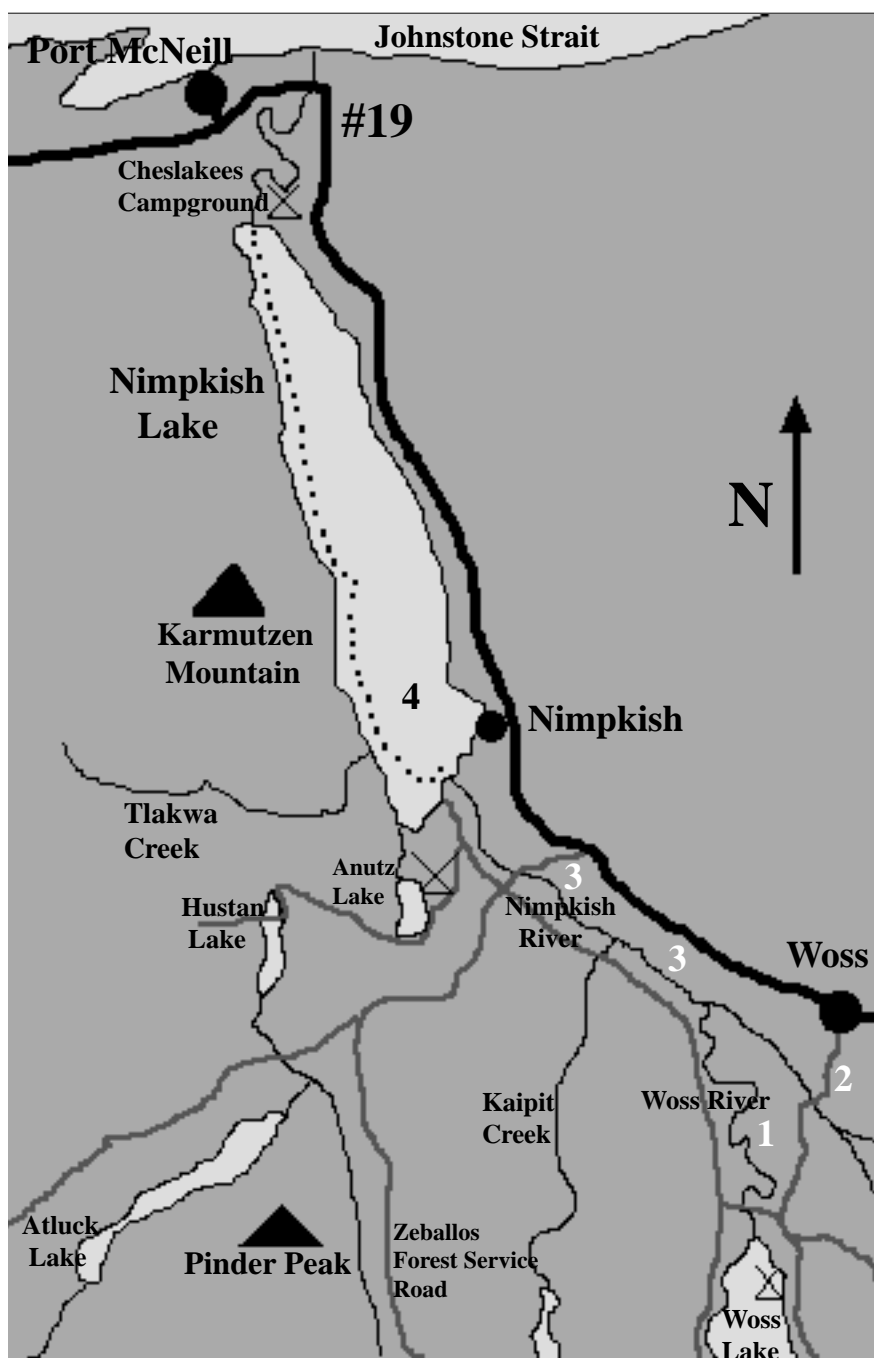
**Required NTS maps:** 92 L/2 Woss Lake,  
92 L/7 Nimpkish

**Synopsis:** The Nimpkish is Vancouver Island's largest river. It flows from sources high in the mountains of the north part of the Island through three major lakes, Vernon, Woss and Nimpkish Lakes before emptying into the Johnstone Strait near Port McNeill.

The Backbone crosses over the Nimpkish near it's headwaters at the Gold-Nimpkish Pass between the Victoria Peak and Tlupana Range sections. It eventually joins the course of the river and follows it from Woss Lake for the final northernmost leg.

The Nimpkish River is a favourite with intermediate and expert whitewater paddlers for it's big river experience broken up by long gentle sections of slower moving water. Overall, in the international river grading system, the river is graded 2 with a couple of grade 3 rapids. The more difficult sections can be lined or portaged around. Less experienced paddlers should scout the river fully before committing to running it.

Planning to run the Nimpkish will depend heavily on the prevailing waterflow volume. The Nimpkish is best paddled in spring, May-June or fall October-November when it is fed by snow melt and rainfall respectively. It may be found too dry during the summer.



**Amenities:** Full services are available in Port McNeill and Port Hardy which are the major centres at this end of Vancouver Island. Some facilities are available in Woss and Nimpkish. There are Forest Service campsites at Woss Lake, Anutz Lake and Chesla-kees at the north end of Nimpkish Lake.

**Access Points:** The Nimpkish River can be accessed from logging roads at Woss Lake, Kaipit Creek and at the south end of Nimpkish Lake. Highway 19 also follows the river and links at Nimpkish and the bridge over the lower Nimpkish near Port McNeill.

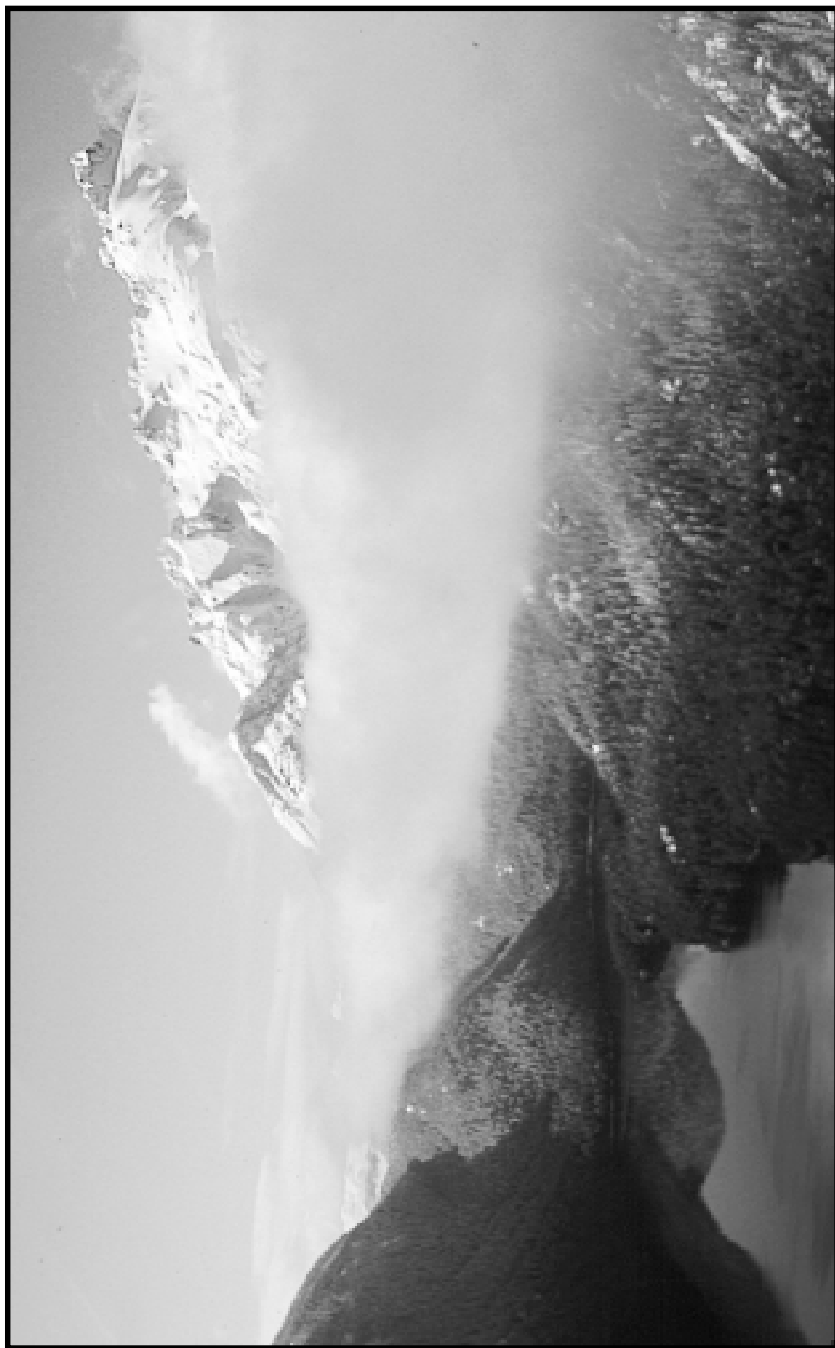
### **Route Notes:**

**1** Woss River is a gentle float at most water levels. But after joining the Nimpkish, paddlers should carefully scout each section of rapids before running them.

**2** It is possible to get down to the Nimpkish River from Woss Road but there is a very steep slope down to the water. The bridge does make an excellent place to check river water levels however.

**3** The two major rapids on the Nimpkish are the Canyon and Iron Mine Rapids, they are around grade 3 and their difficulty is dependent on river volume.

**4** Nimpkish Lake is famed for it's high winds, especially during sunny summer afternoons and during stormy weather. The numerous windsurfers that flock to the lake attest to this. Care then is required in small craft, and boaters should keep close to shore and avoid afternoons when winds are usually strongest.

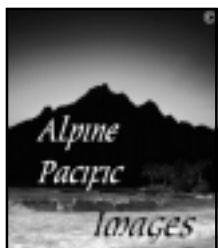


*Aerial view of the south end of Woss Lake and Rugged Mountain.*

# *Notes*







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