

Strathcona Park





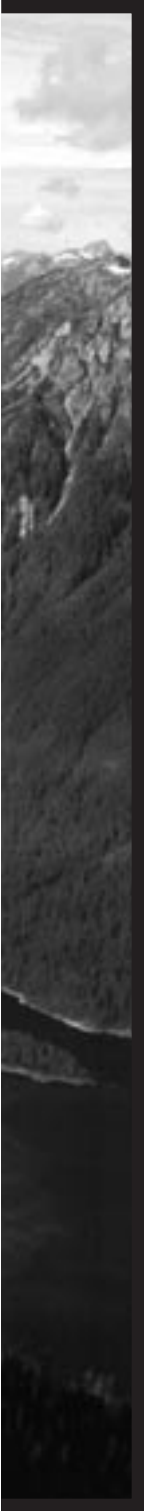




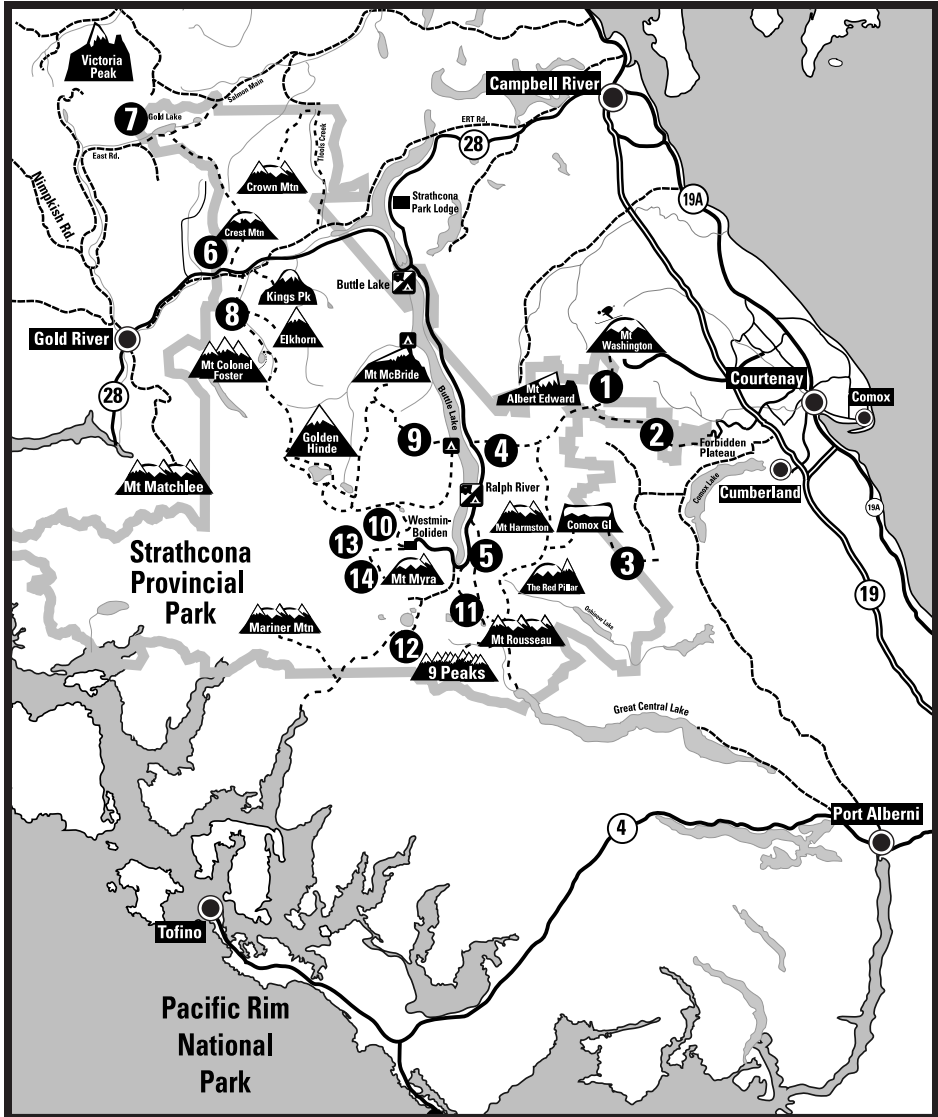
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Strathcona Park Trails



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Strathcona Park History



The welcoming Elk Portal at the Buttle Narrows entrance to Strathcona Park.

The forces of nature have shaped and transformed the land we now know as Strathcona Park for hundreds of millions of years, and what fine work these forces have wrought. Continental upheaval, plate tectonics, the accumulation of sedimentary limestone, the violent power of volcanic activity and the masterful strokes of glaciation have all played a role in shaping the mountains of Vancouver Island.

The First Nations people criss crossed the Island on well worn trading routes for untold millenia. Their legends and cultural ties to the mountains are rich and deep. European settlers arrived on the west coast of British Columbia in the late 1700's. But it took a full one hundred years of fur trading, coal mining and settling along the shorelines before any serious interest was paid to the rugged interior of Vancouver Island.

Several expeditions set out to explore this uncharted territory in the later half of

the 19th century but it wasn't until 1890 that a pivotal endeavour embarked that would lay the foundation for the formation of Strathcona Park.

In that year, 1890, William Ralph was commissioned by the nascent British Columbia Government to survey a swath of land along the east coast of Vancouver Island to be ceded to the Nanaimo & Esquimalt Railway Company. The eastern boundary of this land grant was to be the east shoreline of the island and it was Ralph's task to survey the western boundary which was to parallel the coast some 50 miles inland. This line ran from Sooke Bay near Victoria to Crown Mountain west of Campbell River.

Unbelievable though it may sound Ralph and his party travelled in more or less a straight line placing survey posts at 5 mile intervals. It is this line that we see striking a prominent diagonal along the eastern boundary of Strathcona Park today.

A second key event in the formation of the park, and indeed the exploration of Vancouver Island as a whole, was the 1894 & 1896 expeditions led by the Reverend William W. Bolton. Bolton's forays were enviable affairs journeying from near Shushartie on the northern tip of the island via Quatsino Sound, Nimpkish Lake, Woss Lake, Nootka Sound, Muchalet Inlet, Burman River, Buttle Lake and thence through Price Pass to Great Central Lake and on to Victoria.

In the hundred years plus since Bolton's journey, industrial roads have carved through most of this territory stripping timber and leaving a greatly altered landscape. Bolton's experience will never be equalled as the wilderness that he and his party traversed has been diminished to a fraction of its former glory. (Note: In 2002 Peter Janes traversed the length of Vancouver Island in an incredible 500 km solo hike.)



Curtis Lyon climbing up to the South Summit of Mt. Colonel Foster.

William Bolton paved the way for a third expedition and one that was seminal in the establishment of a park preserve. Acting on the advice of the Governor General of Canada to create a National Park in British Columbia, and impressed by Bolton's account, the then Premier of B.C., Sir Richard McBride, reserved an area in the centre of Vancouver Island for a park in June 1910. The park was named Strathcona after Donald Alexander Smith - Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, Alberta. Lord Strathcona was notable for having driven the last spike on the trans-continental railway.

To formalize the land to be set aside in the park the Minister of Lands, Price Ellison, set off to explore the area departing Campbell River on July 7, 1910 with a party of twenty three including his daughter, 20 year old Myra Ellison. Travelling up the Campbell River on the lake chain Ellison and his party spied Crown Mountain and settled on it to be their prime objective.

Climbing west over Mt. Evelyn and crossing the Tlools Creek valley the party reached the summit of Crown Mountain on July 29, 1910. Ellison and his entourage chose Crown Mountain on a whim but fate played them and the new park a fine hand. Crown Mountain's position on the north side of the Elk Valley looking south into the most impressive group of summits on Vancouver Island gave the Minister one of the

most spectacular alpine views on the island, doubtlessly sealing it in his mind that this was to be the area of the new park.

After resupplying at Buttle Lake, Price Ellison and his party continued in Bolton's footsteps up the lake to Price Creek and followed the route over Price Pass to Port Alberni. Ellison submitted his report on the expedition to cabinet and on March 11, 1911 Strathcona Park was officially designated.

Work began almost immediately under the supervision of Col. Reginald Thomson to bring a road from Campbell River to Buttle Lake and to survey the boundaries of the new park. Thomson commissioned W.W. Urquhart to lead a survey party along with photographer W.R. Kent. Together Urquhart, Kent and Einar Anderson travelled over, through and to the top of almost every major feature in the park during the summers of 1913 and 1914. They named many of the rivers and peaks and their own names will forever be associated with the mountains of Strathcona Park.

The elaborate plans proposed for Strathcona Park in 1911, including a railway branch line and no less than two CP hotels, were quickly put on the shelf with the coming of the First World War. The huge spruce and cedars of the Elk Valley were sequestered for the war effort and this began a change of tide for Strathcona Park.



The ore conveyor and mill at Boliden-Westmin Myra Falls mine.

From that point until the present day the history of Strathcona Park has been one of dogged pursuit by industry for the rich resources within and all around the park. Logging and mining have insidiously chipped away at the original splendour of this great park. A large scale hydro electric project on the Campbell River saw Buttle Lake's rim logged and the valley flooded, raising Buttle Lake and swelling Upper Campbell Lake back into the Elk River. This disastrous act has affected local wind patterns, wildlife habitat and the seasonal fluctuation of the lake reservoirs creates an ongoing eyesore exposing the stumps of a once glorious forest. It is a sad fact that much of this industrial abuse has been perpetrated by Crown corporations and their offspring, overseen by the very provincial government that once had the foresight to declare the region parkland.

Strathcona Park faced its darkest hours in 1987-88 when then Environment Minister Stephen Rogers announced in January 1987 that the 'recommendations' of the Wilderness Advisory Committee would be implemented. This committee suggested deleting large areas from the park and turning them over to logging, mining and other resource interests. One area to be deleted was the entire Bedwell River valley. There was a public outcry and local activists united to form the Friends of Strathcona in order to organize their objections to the ill conceived government policies.¹



A Vancouver Island Ptarmigan in summer plumage.

Matters came to a head in January 1988 when Cream Silver, a company who held mineral 'rights' around Cream Lake announced their plans to begin exploratory drilling. The Friends of Strathcona, the public and media descended on the area around Price Creek. A blockade was formed and for two months a tense standoff ensued. Kel Kelly became the first Canadian to be arrested for defending a park when the RCMP took him into custody. Fortunately the uproar caused the government to back down and instead they commissioned



Myra Falls, a popular place to visit with a short hike from the Buttle Lake Parkway.



Rainbow Pass just east of Morrison Spire, Marble Meadows.

Peter Larkin to conduct an independent review on the future of Strathcona Park. The result was a report 'Restoring the Balance' which paved the way for the subsequent Master Plan which came from a series of extensive public hearings. When the dust settled, the Strathcona Park Master Plan saw park boundaries legislated making it far harder for ministers with shares in mining companies to remove parkland by a simple 'Order

in Council'. Most of the park became designated as Wilderness Conservation land recognizing the true value of wilderness to British Columbians.

Strathcona is still not immune to the whims of political office and recent cutbacks in the Park's Department does not bode well for a smooth ride ahead. Those who love and cherish Strathcona Park should remain vigilant to ensure that it remains part of our children's heritage.



Old growth forest above Buttle Lake on Jack's (Augerpoint) Trail.

Strathcona Provincial Park

Established: 1911

Size: Approx. 250,000 hectares

Map Sheets: 92 F/6 Great Central Lake • 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau • 92 F/12 Buttle Lake • 92 F/13 Upper Campbell Lake

Major Access Routes: Strathcona Park is well serviced by paved highway access while retaining a great deal of wilderness value. Along the east boundary the Island Highway 19 links the communities of Cumberland, Courtenay and Campbell River. The Strathcona Parkway is a paved road servicing the ski resort and growing village at Mt. Washington and provides the best alpine access on the island into Paradise Meadows and Mt. Albert Edward.

Highway 4: To the south Highway 4 runs west from Parksville on the Island Highway 19 through Port Alberni on to the Pacific Rim National Park and the communities of Ucluelet and Tofino. Highway 4 by way of gravel logging roads which branch off it accesses Great Central Lake, Oshinow Lake and the south boundary of the park. From Tofino much of the south west corner of Strathcona may be reached by boat or air.

Highway 28: The only paved road system to actually run through the park is Highway 28 which runs 90 km east to west between Campbell River and Gold River. This road provides access to the interior of Strathcona and most of its trails. A long spur road, the Buttle Lake Parkway a.k.a. Western Mines Road leaves Highway 28 45 km west of Campbell River and runs south down the east shore of Buttle Lake. The Buttle Lake Parkway also provides access to many trails and access routes into the park's mountains.

Menzies Main: To reach the north boundary of Strathcona two unlinked logging road systems must be used. On the north east corner the Menzies Main and Salmon Main branch off Highway 19 north of Campbell River at Menzies Bay. In the north west corner of Strathcona Park, the East and West Main roads (which can be reached off Nimpkish Road which links Gold River and Woss) give access to Gold Lake and the mountains in the north area of the park.

Camping: Buttle Lake campground has vehicle accessible campsites. Campsite reservations are accepted and there are first-come, first-served sites. Driftwood Bay group site on Buttle Lake is serviced by disabled access toilets and covered picnic shelter. This site is available by reservation only. Ralph River also offers vehicle accessible campsites on a first-come, first-served basis - campsites no reservations accepted.

Backcountry users are permitted to camp one km from main roads or, at designated sites where established such as: Bedwell Lake trail, Elk River trail, Della Falls trail and Forbidden Plateau area. Check notices at trailheads for site locations and any special cautions.

Forest Service & Logging Company Offices:

Port Alberni Forest District -4885 Cherry Creek Road, Port Alberni, B.C., V9Y 8E9 Ph: (250) 731-3000

Campbell River Forest District - 231 Dogwood Ave Campbell River BC V9W 2Y1 Ph: 287-2194

Weyerhaeuser - West Island Timberlands - Sproat Lake Operations

-Port Alberni, BC V9Y 7N4 Ph: 250-720-4100

Timberwest Johnstone Strait Operation

-P.O. Box 2500, 5705 North Island Highway Campbell River, BC V9W 5C5 Ph: (250) 287-9181

Weyerhaeuser - North Island Timberlands

-P.O. Box 6000, 8010 Island Highway, Campbell River, BC V9W 5E1 Ph: 250-287-5000

Western Forest Products -#118 – 1334 Island Hwy. Campbell River, BC V9W 8C9 Ph: 250 286-3767

Other Information Sources:

- **Hiking Trails III** - Northern Vancouver Island & Strathcona Park - (9th ed. 2002 Richard K. Blier, ed.) VITIS
- **Beyond Nootka** - A Historical Perspective of Vancouver Island Mountains by Lindsay Elms, www.members.shaw.ca/beyondnootka
- **Wild Isle Magazine:** www.wildisle.ca
- **BC Parks web site:** <http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/strathco.htm>



Della Falls upper cataract in full flow from Cream Lake, June.