

PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

WEST COAST TRAIL

2001 HIKER PREPARATION GUIDE

Pacific Rim National Park Reserve is part of a system of national parks and historic sites stretching from sea to sea to sea. It protects for all time a significant example of Canada's natural and cultural heritage to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment for present and future generations

IMPORTANT!

All persons planning to hike the West Coast Trail must read and understand the material in this guide.

WHO SHOULD HIKE?

The WCT is for experienced backpackers who are in good physical condition - those prepared to have a wilderness experience and adhere to proper back country etiquette. This demanding trek should not be attempted by novice hikers or those with known or recurring knee, back or ankle injuries. Do not make this your first-ever multi-day backpacking trip. An experienced group leader will not compensate for your inexperience. This hike is not recommended for children under 12 years of age. Hiking with a partner or small group is preferable.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The West Coast Trail (WCT) is stunning, rugged and arduous. It winds atop cliffs, over sandstone shelves, through boulder beaches and into muddy rainforests. The spectacular scenery combined with a rich natural and cultural heritage makes this area worthy of national park status. It provides a unique experience for hikers that are physically and mentally prepared for the challenge.

The WCT is an isolated wilderness trail. It is also strenuous, physically demanding and potentially hazardous. Hiking the WCT demands stamina and expertise in hiking and back country camping skills. You are required to wade rivers, use cable cars, negotiate steep slopes, climb ladders and follow an irregular, slippery trail. The Trail is managed to maintain the ecological integrity of the area while minimizing human interference. Hazards are numerous.

It may take up to 24 hours or more before help arrives, should an accident occur. All hikers should carefully evaluate their individual and group abilities before attempting the WCT. **Is this a hike your group should attempt?**

On average, people take 6 to 7 days to hike the WCT. Too rigid a schedule does not allow time to actually enjoy the trail. Weather can change quickly. Rainfall averages 300 cm (120 in.) per year with heavy rainfall possible at any time during the summer and common during May and June. The average summer temperature is 14° Celsius (57° F). Heavy morning fog is very common, especially in July and August. A solid week of rain can make hiking the WCT a very unpleasant experience and flood waters will almost certainly

delay hikers at some river crossings. **Be flexible and have alternative plans - allow extra days and food for delays due to adverse weather.**

ABOUT THE WCT

Many First Nations call the west side of Vancouver Island home. With the arrival of Europeans, it gained another name – Graveyard of the Pacific. A telegraph line had been laid to facilitate communication between a string of lighthouses along the coast. Following the disastrous wreck of the *Valencia* in 1906, a trail was built to allow shipwreck survivors to reach safety. This trail evolved into the WCT.

The management and operation of the West Coast Trail are the responsibility of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada. The Park is assisted in some WCT recreational-use operations through a partnership with the QUU'AS West Coast Trail Group, a joint venture of the Pacheedaht, Huu-ay-aht and Ditidaht First Nations.

National Park personnel and QUU'AS staff patrol the WCT regularly between May and early October. Park wardens are responsible for regulation enforcement. Both are responsible for hiker information and assistance, trail upkeep, public safety and protection of natural and cultural resources.

The WCT is open from May 1 to September 30. Frequent and prolonged periods of heavy rain, strong winds, high tides, large waves and short days during the winter season necessitate closing the trail for the remainder of the year.

ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY ALONG THE WCT

The first priority of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve is the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes. In simpler language, we want to have all the plants, animals and other organisms that make up the

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temperate rainforest and ocean environments on the west coast of Vancouver Island to continue to exist and to evolve as they would without interference.

People are still encouraged to visit, appreciate and enjoy the – but in ways that leave them unimpaired for future generations. Use but don't abuse West Coast Trail.

WCT LOGISTICS AND POLICY

All WCT users must have a Trail Use Permit in their possession. Their purpose is to reduce overcrowding and ecological degradation of the West Coast Trail. A trail use fee is in effect for overnight users of the Trail to assist in offsetting the cost of operating the WCT.

Each day between May 1 and September 30 inclusive, 26 hikers (20 reserved and 6 wait-listed) may start at Pachena Bay (north) and 26 at Gordon River (south).

The total distance of the WCT is 75 km (47 miles). Starting points are at Pachena Bay (north) and Gordon River (south). **Use of Nitinat Lake as a starting point was discontinued as of 1999.** Exit points are at Pachena Bay, Gordon River and Nitinat Lake. These are the only sanctioned entrance or exit points on the trail. Exit or entrance at any other point (e.g., Thrasher Cove) is not permissible unless an official evacuation is required.

All those overnighting on the WCT must carry a Trail Use Permit. This includes accessing the WCT by boat. Hikers without a Trail Use Permit will not be permitted to complete their trip or be provided ferry services.

Anyone interested in travel around the Nitinat Triangle or Tsusiat Lake must contact the Park Information/ Registration Centre for a permit.

A Trail Use Permit will not be issued to children under the age of 6.

Maximum group size is 10 people.

DAY HIKING ON THE WCT

ADay hikers in the West Coast Trail unit of the Park must obtain a free Day Use Permit before hiking. Permits can be obtained from one of the Park Information / Registration Centres.

Day hikers who start at Gordon River must pay for return ferry service across Gordon River (anticipated fee is \$15.00 per person is subject to change).

Due to weather, natural, financial or operational concerns the WCT may not be accessible to the public.

WCT FERRY CROSSINGS

There are two major water crossings on the WCT that require hiker ferry services: the Gordon River and Nitinat Narrows. Ferry services are provided by the QUU'AS West Coast Trail Group. The fee for each crossing is anticipated to be \$12.50 per person (fees subject to change) and must be paid at the Park Information / Registration Centres when you register. To cross the rivers, you must show your Trail Use Permit to the ferry operators. Hikers without a valid permit will be denied passage.

FINISHING AT NITINAT?

Nitinat is a small remote community. While it is possible to finish at this location, you should expect the unexpected.

There are potentially two ferry services available for hikers planning to finish at Nitinat Lake. Both services are operated by independent operators and are private businesses. Schedules and operations are subject to change without notice. Hikers must make arrangements with the operators directly.

The Nitinat Lake Water Taxi makes one regular trip every evening at 5:00 pm up the lake to Nitinat Village. This may involve having to overnight in Nitinat. The West Coast Trail Express Bus will pick up at Nitinat Village on the way to one of the Trail heads, provided that a reservation is made.

Another possible option is to make a reservation with the Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi to pick you up at Nitinat Narrows and take you back to Bamfield or Port Renfrew. This service cannot be confirmed.

Summary of Fees:

FEE PER PERSON	COST	PAID AT	REFUNDABLE
Reservation Fee	\$25.00	time of reserving	Not refundable
Park Use Fee	\$70.00	Park Information / Registration Centre	Not refundable
Gordon River Ferry (one way)	\$12.50	Park Information / Registration Centre	Refundable in person at Park Information / Registration Centre if not used
Nitinat Narrows Ferry (one way)	\$12.50	Park Information / Registration Centre	Refundable in person at Park Information / Registration Centre if not used

Please note ferry fees may be subject to change without notice.

TRANSPORTATION FOR THE WCT

Parks Canada provides this listing for the convenience of hikers. It is not intended as a testimonial for the listed services.

Hikers must make their own arrangements for all of the following services. Transportation services to and from the WCT are subject to change. Hikers are encouraged to call ahead to obtain the latest information and schedules on available services. In most cases, reservations are recommended. Please refer to the map and telephone numbers on page 9.

To Pachena Bay Trail head 5 km south of Bamfield:

- drive on gravel logging roads from Port Alberni (1 ½hrs) or Duncan (3 hrs);
- bus from Victoria (4 hrs) or Nanaimo (3 hrs) Port Alberni (1 ½hrs)
(West Coast Trail Express);
- ferry from Port Alberni (4 hrs)
(Alberni Marine Transport Ltd.);

To Gordon River Trail head 5 km north of Port Renfrew:

- drive from Victoria via Highway 14 (2 hrs);
- bus from Victoria (2 hrs)
(West Coast Trail Express).

Between Port Renfrew, Nitinat and Bamfield:

- bus (3 hrs) (West Coast Trail Express);
- ferry (4 hrs) (Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi; service may not be available to Nitinat. Please check at the trailheads).

Hikers have a number of options regarding the leaving of vehicles at or near the two Trail heads.

Nitinat Narrows to Nitinat Village:

- ferry leaves Nitinat Narrows at approximately 5:00 p.m. every night (1 hr) (Nitinat Lake Water Taxi).

Air charter service may also be available.

AT THE TRAIL HEADS

There are basic tourism services at, or near, both Trail heads and Nitinat Village. These include accommodations, campgrounds, phones, fuel, some groceries, tours and food services. There are no banking or cash advance facilities in the villages of Bamfield, Port Renfrew or at the Park Information / Registration Centres.

All overnight users of the WCT must participate in a 1 hour orientation session, pay the trail use fee and ferry crossing fees and register on the trail before they will be issued a Trail Use Permit. This process takes about 1 ½hours, at the Park Information/ Registration Centres nearest your starting Trail head.

Orientation sessions are offered at: 9:30 a.m., noon, 1:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. Please bring the map enclosed in your reservation package. Hikers may register as early as 3:30 p.m. the day before their hike commences.

The trail use fee (\$70.00 Canadian per person) is mandatory, non-refundable **and is in addition to the \$25 Reservation Fee.** Payment can be made by cash, traveller's cheques (Canadian currency only), VISA, MasterCard or Debit Card.

Late Arrivals: Hikers with reservations who will arrive after 1:00 p.m. on their reserved start date, must contact the Park Information/ Registration Centre nearest their starting Trail head to prevent their reserved spaces from being given to hikers on the wait-list. We strongly recommend hikers start the trail with a minimum of 5 hours before sunset to ensure a camping area is reached before nightfall.

All hikers must register off the WCT at the end of their hike. Return one copy of the Trail Use Permit to the Park Information / Registration Centre when your hike is complete. Permits can be placed in the drop box, or slid under the door if the Centre is closed. To assist the Park with client service, comment forms can also be completed at the end of your hike.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

As a WCT hiker, practice low-impact, no trace camping. All hikers must be prepared to adhere to proper back country etiquette, specifically:

Pack it in and OUT! There are no garbage cans on the WCT. Metal food lockers are not garbage receptacles. Everything you bring on your hike, you must take back out. **Garbage kills wildlife.**

Cooking should be done on a lightweight stove. Do not rely on campfires for cooking, staying warm or drying out.

Fires are permitted on the beach only, never in forested areas. Keep fires small, use only driftwood, do not cut any trees or other vegetation and keep fires away from logs. Use previously established beach fire rings where possible. Do not use old fire rings in the forest. Make sure fires are extinguished with water and dismantled before leaving. Clean up all fire debris after the fire is out so that no trace is left. Try fireless camping.

Be water-wise. Drinking water is available from most rivers and creeks. To be safe, it should be collected upstream then purified, boiled or filtered.

Ensure safe water and health conditions. Use the outhouses and beach privies located along the WCT.

If hikers are stuck between outhouses, they should dig a small hole at least 30 metres (three bus lengths) away from water sources, campsites or the trail. Bury the human waste and dispose of all toilet paper in the outhouses, burn it or pack it out. Do not bury toilet paper.

Wash yourself, your clothes and dishes in the ocean or at creek mouths and use biodegradable soaps only. Dispose of all dirty water at least 30 m. away from drinking water sources.

Consider food carefully. Bring an adequate supply of high-energy, and lightweight easily cooked food. Pack enough food for emergencies and extra days.

From May to October the WCT is closed to harvesting and consumption of all bivalves (clams, mussels, oysters) due to regular occurrences of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) which can result in serious illness or death.

Patrol Cabins along the WCT are not available for public use. There are no shelters or accommodations for hiker use.

First Nation Reserves located along the WCT are private property. The entire trail passes through the traditional territories of First Nation peoples. Please respect these lands, structures and cultural and natural resources both on the Reserves and throughout the length of the trail. QUU'AS Guardians regularly patrol the reserves and cultural resource areas and may be able to provide information on these areas. Stay on the main trail and obey all signs when on reserve lands. **Violators will be prosecuted.**

It is an offence under the National Parks Act to collect or remove any object or heritage resource within National Park boundaries.

This means that destroying or damaging natural or cultural resources, cutting trees for firewood or makeshift shelters and collecting or removing marine life, shellfish, fossils, artifacts, plants, etc. is **PROHIBITED**. Please leave Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and the WCT in as good or better condition than you found it.

Maximum group size permitted on the WCT is 10 total. Do not split the group up. Respect the capabilities of the slowest group members and regroup at regular stops.

Schedule your hike to arrive at designated campsites if possible. Camp on the beach above the high-tide line. This will help reduce impacts and soil compaction in vegetated areas.

Leave pets and firearms at home. They are not permitted on the WCT.

TRAIL CONDITIONS

READ THE “HIKER ADVISORY” POSTED AT THE PARK INFORMATION / REGISTRATION CENTRES TO LEARN THE MOST CURRENT TRAIL CONDITIONS.

Take your time and enjoy your experience.

Avoid unreasonable deadlines when planning and executing your hike. Seven days is a reasonable length of time to hike the entire WCT. Many accidents and injuries occur when hikers are rushing, not paying attention to terrain, tired, or hiking too late in the day. Take adequate rest breaks.

Assume all walking surfaces are slippery at all times, and especially during damp or rainy periods. Pay special attention to wood surfaces, algae-covered rocks on the beach and steep trail sections. Be prepared to wait out a storm or high-water on river and creek crossings. Hazards may be found throughout the trail; earth slumps or falling trees may change the route of the trail bed for extended periods of time.

Bridges, ladders and cable cars require close attention.

Bridges and Ladders: All structures along the trail are maintained regularly. However, harsh climatic conditions mean that their condition may change. Special care should be taken on any built structure. It is suggested that only one or two persons access any bridge at the same time. Ladders often exist in a series. Limit the number of people on an individual ladder to two or three at any time to minimize the risk to others behind you. Large groups should allow extra time to get by any ladder.

Cable Cars: Keep your fingers, hands and hair away from the pulleys. Only two people (and their gear) per cable car. Platforms can be very slippery, use caution. To enter, use the rope to pull the car towards you. Hold the car steady while you load your gear, then carefully enter and stay seated. To cross the river, let the rope go and gravity will move the car down the rope to the middle of the river. You must then pull the rope hand-over-hand to reach the platform on the

other side. Hold the rope so that the car stays in place, flush with the platform, and carefully unload. Do not bounce or sway in the car. **Never tie the cable cars up to the platform.**

It may be necessary to cross some creeks and rivers by wading. Wait for safe water levels and low tides, undo your pack hip-belt (if you fall, you can slip out of your pack more easily) and wear running shoes or sandals. Avoid crossing any surge channels.

High tides can make beach walking very difficult or impossible. Follow both the Tide Tables and Map carefully to avoid being trapped or cut off. Remember to add one hour to tide tables for daylight-saving time. Watch also for large ocean waves and swells. Consider night-time high tides when pitching your tent on the beach.

Hang your food, garbage and toiletries out of reach of animals and away from tents. If metal food lockers are available, use them. Do not cook in or near tents. Maintain a clean, garbage-free campsite.

Bears and Cougars. Hikers may encounter black bears and cougars on the WCT. All wild animals are potentially dangerous and demand your respect. Knowledge, alertness and a clean campsite can help avoid a dangerous encounter with a bear or cougar. Never approach a bear or cougar. Always give them an avenue of escape. If you encounter a bear or cougar, do not run - it may trigger an attack. Try to move calmly away to a more secure place. As a last resort if attacked, try to shield yourself with an object (e.g. backpack).

Up to date wildlife information is available at the Park Information / Registration Centres and from personnel on the Trail.

The WCT is offered as a backcountry experience. The trail is managed to maintain the ecological integrity of the area while minimizing human interference and impacts. Hazards are numerous.

INJURIES AND EVACUATIONS

Park wardens evacuate between 50 and 80 hikers due to serious injury every season.

Approximately 200 hikers per year sustain minor injuries but manage to limp off the trail.

Are you a fit and experienced backpacker? A considerable number of injuries on the WCT involve novice hikers with little or no backpacking experience.

Slips, trips and falls occur due to a variety of reasons. Slippery conditions on muddy trails, wooden surfaces, boulders and rocky shorelines are a major hazard. Hiking too fast, fatigue, poor light conditions, improperly balanced or heavy packs and inadequate footwear all contribute to injuries and accidents.

During wet, rainy periods occurrences of physical injury and hypothermia increase significantly. Even in summer, with fairly mild temperatures, the potential for hypothermia exists due to thick sea fog, heavy rain and strong winds. Weather conditions combined with hiker fatigue can lead to hypothermia.

Each hiking party is responsible for assisting injured members of their party. If you are not seriously injured and are near the Trailhead, then attempt to get off the Trail with the assistance of your party or other hikers. Do not continue hiking in the hope that your condition will improve.

National Park wardens are responsible for patrolling the WCT and assisting injured hikers. The majority of evacuations are done by boat. If complex search and rescue situations arise, a number of cooperating agencies assist with evacuations. Park wardens will evacuate injured hikers to the nearest trail exit point or the nearest ambulance or medical facility. This will not necessarily be the most convenient location for the injured hiker.

If you have a legitimate injury or require assistance and are not able to exit the Trail on your own, follow the instructions in the “West Coast Trail Safety Information” sheet that is issued to all hikers when they register.

Minor complaints such as blisters, sore feet, fatigue and lack of food do not warrant evacuation.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

To have a positive experience on the WCT you must stay warm and dry. Bring appropriate clothing that will keep you comfortable. Make sure that you are able to quickly prepare hot meals and drinks. Aim for quality and lightweight equipment. Reassess your pack contents if it is too heavy. Injuries may occur as a result of carrying a pack which is too heavy.

Sturdy boots. High quality hiking boots with good ankle and arch support are required. Rubber soles provide better traction on slippery surfaces than hard Vibram soles. Do not break in new boots on this hike. Sandals or running shoes are good for wearing around camp and for river crossings only. Bring first-aid supplies to treat blisters adequately.

Waterproof rain suit. Quality jacket and pants coupled with a layering system is most effective. Underlayers should be quick drying and keep you warm even when wet. (Warm wool or fleece sweater, warm hat, gloves).

Lightweight backpacking stove and fuel. You cannot rely on fires during stormy, wet weather.

High energy, lightweight, quick-cooking food. Before leaving, minimize packaging to reduce garbage and weight.

Backpack. Require a padded hip belt and should be lined with plastic bags. Your pack should weigh a maximum of 1/4 (women) to 1/3 (men) of your body weight.

A tent with a waterproof fly is absolutely necessary.

Sleeping bag. Synthetic fills are preferable. (Down bags lose warmth when wet). Pack sleeping bags in waterproof bags and carry them inside packs.

Closed-cell foam sleeping pad.

Lighter or waterproof matches, candles and fire starters.

Garbage bags to pack out all your refuse.

Wrist watch. This is absolutely necessary for Tide Table use.

Waterproof West Coast Trail Map and Tide Tables. Maps are included in your reservation package or for sale at the Park Information / Registration Centres. Tide tables are available at the Park Information / Registration Centres.

First aid kit. Include blister treatment and insect sting protection.

15 meters (50 ft) of synthetic rope per group to hang food, use as cloths line, etc.

Also . . . emergency signaling device, cash for unexpected emergencies, water bottle, water purification equipment, biodegradable soap, toilet paper, zip-lock type plastic bags for keeping permits and other small items dry.

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT

Gaiters to keep mud and sand out of boots.

Hiking staff or collapsible ski pole(s). Some hikers find a walking staff useful on uneven and slippery terrain. Bring your own or find a good stick on the beach. Do not cut live material!

Sun screen, sunglasses, toiletries.

Flashlight.

Compact weather radio.

Repair kits for equipment.

Knife.

Lightweight shoes for camp.

Cellular phones do work in many areas on the WCT. They work best from the beaches. Please do not use cellular phones indiscriminately to summon unnecessary assistance. To report legitimate emergencies or hazards, call:

Wardens (250) 726-8035
Or

Marine VHF Radio: Coast Guard will answer; request the Warden Number

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You will not need an axe. Leave it at home!

Fire arms and pets are prohibited on the WCT.

REFERENCES

The following two references are part of the Reservation Information Package. Maps may also be purchased from the Park Information / Reservation Centres, The Park Administration Centre and retail outlets:

Canadian Cartographics. 1998. *The Official West Coast Trail Map*. Coquitlam, British Columbia. (fold out map)

Canadian Hydrographic Service. *Canadian Tide and Current Tables 2000 Barkley Sound and Discovery Passage to Dixon Entrance. Volume 6*. (Tofino Tide Table) (Distributed at the Park Information / Reservation Centres).

The following reference may purchased at Park Information / Reservation Centres, the Park Administration Office and retail outlets.

MacFarlane, J.M., H.J. Quan, K.K. Uyeda, K.D. Wong. 1996. Official Guidebook to Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. Blackbird Naturgraphics Inc. Calgary, Alberta.

Many hikers find guide books useful. Conditions along the trail vary over the years and these changes may or may not be reflected in a guidebook. Conditions at the trailheads have improved and these are not necessarily reflected in these books.

The following are not available from the Park. They may be purchased from retail outlets.

Foster, D and W. Aitken. 1995. Blisters and Bliss: fifth edition. Cloudcap Press, Seattle, Washington.

Leadem, T. 1998. The West Coast Trail and Other Great Hikes: eighth edition, Sierra Club of Western Canada, Douglas and McIntyre. Vancouver, British Columbia

Brawn, A. 1997. **Soaring with the Eagles on Canada's West Coast Trail**, The University of Calgary. Calgary, Alberta

Obee, B. 1998. **Pacific Rim Explorer**: seventh edition. Whitecap Books, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Gill, I and D. Nunuk. 1995. **Hiking on the Edge**: First Edition. Raincoast Books, Vancouver, British Columbia

G. Allen. 1994. **Timeless Shore Canada's West Coast Trail**: first edition. Bayeux Publishing. Calgary, Alberta

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT
THE FOLLOWING PACIFIC RIM
NATIONAL PARK RESERVE NATIONAL
PARK FACILITIES**

Pachena Bay Information / Registration Centre

Phone/Fax: (250) 728-3234

Open daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., May 1 to Oct. 5

Gordon River Information / Registration Centre

Phone: (250) 647-5434

Fax: (250) 647-0016

Open daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., May 1 to Oct. 5

Park Administration Office

2185 Ocean Terrace Road

P.O. Box 280, Ucluelet, BC V0R 3A0

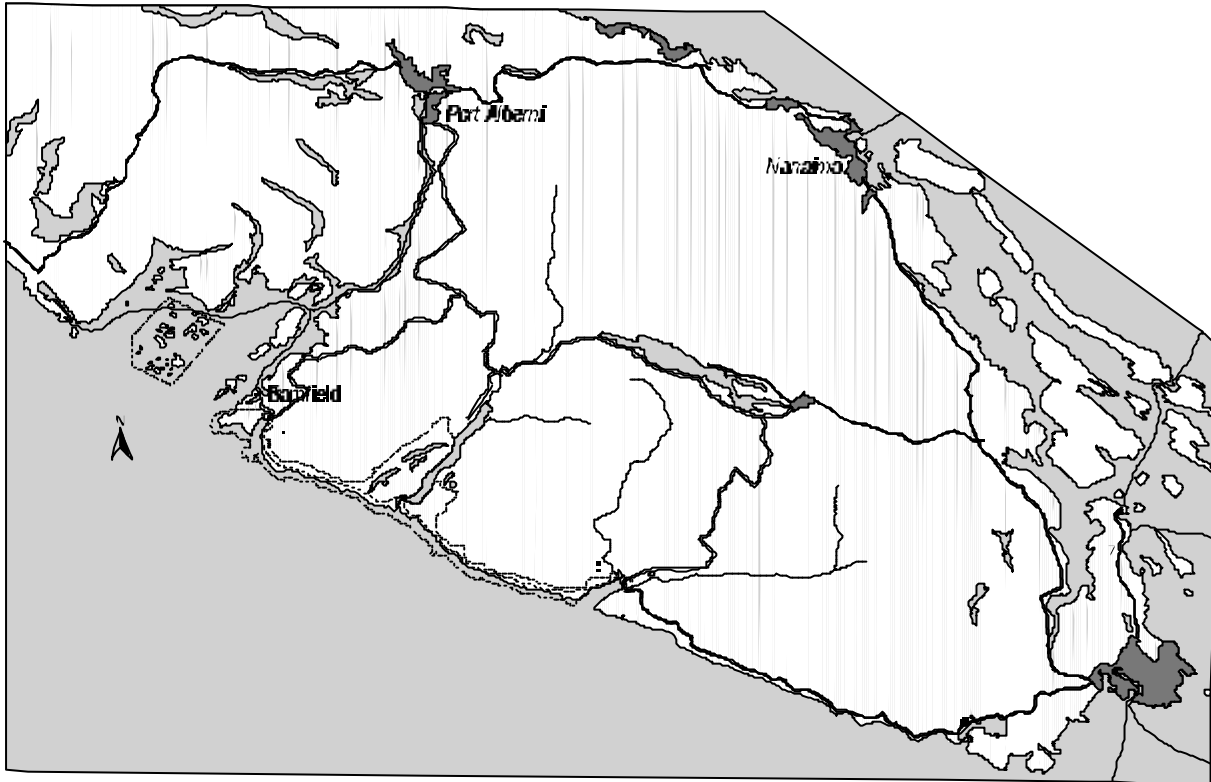
Phone: (250) 726-7721 (year-round)

Internet: pacriminfo@pch.gc.ca

Long Beach Information Centre

Phone: (250) 726-4212 (June - September)

SOUTHERN VANCOUVER ISLAND AND THE WEST COAST TRAIL UNIT
OF
PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE OF CANADA
(not intended for hiking purposes)



HIKER SERVICES (effective December 1999 - subject to change)

Pachena Bay Information / Registration Centre	(250) 728-3234
Gordon River Information / Registration Centre	(250) 647-5434
Pacific Rim National Park Reserve	(250) 726-7721
QUU'AS West Coast Trail Group	(250) 723-4393
BC Ferries	(250) 386-3431 (Vancouver to Victoria or Nanaimo)
Seattle Ferry	(250) 382-8100 (Seattle to Victoria)
West Coast Trail Express Bus	(250) 477-8700 (Victoria, Nanaimo, Bamfield, Port Renfrew, Bamfield; Port Alberni to Bamfield)
Alberni Marine Transport	(250) 723-8313 (Port Alberni to Bamfield passenger ferry)
Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi	(250) 755-6578 (between Port Renfrew, Nitinat Narrows and Bamfield)
Nitinat Lake Water Taxi	(250) 745-3509 (across Nitinat Narrows and to Nitinat Village)