

# WEST COAST TRAIL

## 2004 HIKER PREPARATION GUIDE

### PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE OF CANADA

*Pacific Rim National Park Reserve is part of Canada's system of national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas. 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.*

The West Coast Trail (WCT) is an internationally renowned 75KM (47 mile) historic route along sandstone cliffs, waterfalls, caves, sea arches, sea stacks and beaches that compose the stunning coastline of western Vancouver Island.

The trail's origins date back to the late 1800's and the days of tall sailing ships and steamers. So many vessels were lost on the rocks and shoals of this rugged coast that it came to be known as "the Graveyard of the Pacific". In 1906, the wreck of the steamer "Valencia" with the loss of 133 lives prompted the construction of the Pachena Lighthouse and the "Dominion Life Saving Trail". The trail, boasting a telegraph-line and patrol cabins, allowed shipwreck victims and rescuers to travel through the almost impenetrable forests.

Over the years, as navigation technology improved, the Life Saving Trail became obsolete and fell into disrepair. In 1973, the trail was included in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada, beginning a new chapter in its history. Today, hikers come from all over the world to experience the beauty, history and First Nation's culture of the West Coast Trail. However, this rugged hike is not for everyone. You and your party's fitness, knowledge and skills must meet the challenges of the area.

#### **All hikers in your group must be prepared:**

- for 5-7 days in the backcountry;
- for rugged, uneven ground: it takes a minimum of 2 days to travel the southern 22km of the trail between Gordon River and Walbran Creek;
- for slippery conditions on muddy trails, wooden surfaces, boulders and rocky shorelines.
- to wade rivers, negotiate steep slopes and earth slumps, climb ladders, use cable cars and follow an irregular trail;
- for damaged structures. Trail maintenance is ongoing. The condition of structures can change at any time;
- for a temperate rainforest climate. Rainfall averages 300 cm (120 in.) per year with heavy rainfall possible at any time and common during May and June. Floodwaters can delay hikers for days. Morning fog is common, especially in July and August. The average summer temperature is 14° Celsius (57° F). Incidents of hypothermia and physical injury increase significantly during prolonged wet periods;



- for accidents and injuries. It may take more than 24 hours for help to arrive if an accident occurs.

**The West Coast Trail is for hikers who are:**

- able to walk long distances through rough terrain with a heavy pack;
- prepared to have an isolated wilderness experience and adhere to low impact back country camping standards.

**The West Coast Trail should not be considered by:**

- children under twelve;
- hikers with little experience in multi-day backpacking trips;
- those with little stamina or recurring knee, back or ankle injuries.

*Note: an experienced group leader will NOT compensate for inexperienced hikers.*

## **PLANNING YOUR TRIP**

**The WCT is open from May 1 to September 30.** Prolonged periods of heavy rain, strong winds, high tides, large waves and short days necessitate closing the trail from October 1 to April 30.

**Maximum group size is 10.** The only exceptions are school groups starting the Trail between May 1-20 and September 20-24 . These school groups may be as large as 18 hikers.

**Entrance points:** Pachena Bay (north) and Gordon River (south)

**Exit points:** Pachena Bay, Gordon River and Nitinat Lake. Entrance or exit at any other point is not permitted unless an evacuation is required. (Reference map located on page 12). Anyone interested in travel in the Nitinat Triangle should contact the WCT Information Centres for information.

**All people using the WCT unit require a park permit.**

Day Users (persons entering and exiting from the same location on the same date) require a Day Use Permit. Overnight users require a WCT Overnight Use Permit. We do not recommend children under 12 hike the WCT. A WCT Overnight Use Permit will not be issued to children under 6. Permits are issued at the WCT Information Centres.

**A quota system** limiting the number of WCT Overnight Use Permits was implemented by Parks Canada to reduce overcrowding and ecological degradation. Some hikers prefer to apply for quota spaces in advance of their hike start date; other hikers opt to apply for quota space when they arrive at a WCT Information Centre. See the following table for details.

<b>Obtain quota spaces by applying for:</b>	
<b>Standby</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimums of 5 spaces per trailhead, or 10 spaces total, are allocated via standby per day.</li> <li>• Register in person at a WCT Information Centre as soon as you arrive in the area.</li> <li>• From Monday through Friday in the shoulder season* there is no hiker quota on the West Coast Trail. As long as hikers participate in one of the orientation sessions they will be issued a WCT Overnight Use Permit on the day that they arrive.</li> <li>• In peak season**: hikers should anticipate a wait of 1-2 days. Spaces are allocated at 1:00 PM each day from the WCT Information Centres.</li> </ul>
<b>Reservations through Super, Natural BC (SNBC)</b>	<p>Parks Canada has discontinued reservations in the shoulder season*. The shoulder season daily quota is rarely filled. Reservations are available during peak season**</p> <p>Hikes starting in June can be reserved as of April 1.  Hikes starting in July can be reserved as of May 1.  Hikes starting in August can be reserved as of June 1.  Hikes starting in September can be reserved as of July 1</p> <p>To make a reservation, call SNBC:  Toll Free Canada/ USA: 1-800-435-5622  Greater Vancouver: 604-435-5622  International: 250-387-1642</p> <p>Reservations may be made up to 2 days before the hike start date. When calling, have the following details ready:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your intended start date and two alternate start dates.</li> <li>• The trailhead you plan to start your hike from (Pachena or Gordon River).</li> <li>• The number of hikers in your group.</li> <li>• A mailing address (the information package will be sent to this address).</li> <li>• Your credit card (Visa or MasterCard).</li> </ul>
<b>School and Non-profit Group Reservations</b>	<p>Leaders: ask for a School Group and Non-profit Organization Policy and Request Form from the Park Administration Office between Sept 15 and Dec 31 of the year prior to your intended hike.</p>
<b>Commercial Groups Reservations</b>	<p>Hikers may obtain a list of operators from the National Park. Leaders: ask for a Commercial Group Policy and Request Form from the Park Administration Office between Sept 15 and Dec 31 of the year prior to your intended hike.</p>

\* Shoulder season (May 1-June 14 and September 16-30)

\*\* Peak season (June 15- Sept. 15)

## FEES

A **use fee** is required of all overnight users of the WCT. Use fees help support the cost of operating the WCT (e.g. regular maintenance, construction of ladders, cable cars and bridges).

**Ferry fees** pay for ferry service across the Gordon River and Nitinat Narrows. Ferry services are provided by Quu'as West Coast Trail Society throughout the hiking season. Your proof of payment is your WCT Overnight Use Permit. Be prepared to show this to the ferry operators. Hikers without a valid permit will be denied passage.

A **reservation fee** is applicable when making a reservation through Super Natural BC (SNBC).

<b>WCT Fees</b> (as of Feb 2003)	
<b>Reservation Fee</b>	<b>\$25.00</b>
<b>WCT Overnight Use Fee</b>	<b>\$90.00</b>
<b>Ferry Fee Gordon River</b>	<b>\$14.00</b>
<b>Ferry Fee Nitinat Narrows</b>	<b>\$14.00</b>

- Contact the National Park for an up to date fees schedule prior to your departure. Fees may change at any time.
- All fees are listed per person and in Canadian funds.
- Payment can be made at the WCT Information Centre using cash, traveler's cheques (Canadian currency only), VISA, MasterCard, American Express and Debit Card.

## CANCELLATION POLICY

- **Ferry Fees:** Refund for unused ferry services are available at the WCT Information Centres.
- **Reservation Fee:** paid to SNBC is non-refundable.
- **WCT Overnight Use Fee paid through SNBC:** cancellations made 21 days or more before the hike start date are eligible for refund through SNBC. A cancellation fee of \$6.42 per booking applies.
- **WCT Overnight Use Fee paid at the WCT Information Centre:** non-refundable.

## TRANSPORTATION FOR THE WCT

Parks Canada provides this listing for the convenience of hikers. It is not intended as a testimonial for the services. Hikers make their own arrangements for transportation services. Refer to the map and telephone numbers provided on pages 11 and 12. Reservations are recommended.

Vehicles can be left at a number of locations near the trailheads. Ask for details at the WCT Information Centre.

### **To Pachena Bay Trailhead, 5 km south of Bamfield:**

drive on gravel logging roads from Port Alberni (1-2 hrs) or Duncan (3 hrs);  
bus from Victoria (4 hrs) or Nanaimo (3 hrs) Port Alberni (1 ½ hrs) (West Coast Trail Express);  
ferry from Port Alberni (4 hrs) (Alberni Marine Transport Ltd.);

### **To Gordon River Trailhead, 5 km north of Port Renfrew:**

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

### **Nitinat Narrows to Nitinat Village:**

ferry usually makes a trip at 5:00 PM from the Narrows to Nitinat Village (The Nitinat Lake Water Taxi)  
Nitinat Village is a small, remote community. An overnight stay may be required.

### **Between Port Renfrew, Nitinat and Bamfield:**

- bus (3 hrs) (West Coast Trail Express) reservation must be made;
- ferry (4 hrs) (Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi; check at the WCT Information Centre for availability of this service).

Before you leave for the Trail write a trip plan: leave it with a responsible person (e.g. friend or family member). Detail where you are going, with whom and when you plan to return (a WCT Overnight Use Permit does not fulfil this role).

## AT THE TRAILHEADS

There are basic tourism services at, or near, both Trailheads and Nitinat Village. These include accommodations, campgrounds, phones, fuel, some groceries, and food services. There are no banking facilities in the villages of Bamfield, Port Renfrew or Nitinat.

### ORIENTATION SESSION

All overnight users of the West Coast Trail participate in an orientation session. The purpose of the orientation is to:

- Reduce the number of hiker injuries by addressing common safety issues;
- Reduce environmental impacts by providing backcountry etiquette information to park users;
- Provide information about current issues and trail conditions;
- Provide a brief history of the West Coast Trail and its place in Canada's heritage;
- Issue the WCT Overnight Use Permits and collect fees.

Bring your reservation confirmation information (if applicable) and your WCT map to the orientation .

Orientation sessions are offered at 9:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. at both WCT Information Centres. Gordon River also offers an additional orientation at noon.

Reservations are not necessary for orientation sessions. The orientation process takes about 1½ hours.

Hikers may participate in an orientation session as early as 3:30 PM the day before their hike starts.

Hikers with reservations who will arrive after 1:00 PM on their reserved start date must contact the WCT Information Centre nearest their starting Trailhead to prevent their reserved spaces from being given to hikers on standby.

We strongly recommend hikers start the trail with a minimum of 5 hours before sunset to ensure a camping area is reached before nightfall.

Register off the WCT at the end of your hike. Return one copy of the WCT Overnight Use Permit to a WCT Information Centre. Permits can be placed in the drop box, or slid under the door if the Centre is closed.

# ON THE TRAIL

## PROTECTING, PRESENTING AND PRESERVING

Parks Canada is responsible for ensuring the sustainability and integrity of the natural and cultural resources in its care. Working with others, we strive to provide Canadians and their visitors with the opportunity to learn about the heritage of this country.

The entire national park falls within the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth people who have inhabited Vancouver Island's west coast for countless generations. The Nuu-chah-nulth are comprised of many individual nations. The West Coast Trail Unit lies within the traditional territory of the Huu-ay-aht, Ditidaht and Pacheedaht First Nations.

Parks Canada and the Quu'as West Coast Trail Society (comprised of Huu-ay-aht, Ditidaht and Pacheedaht First Nations) cooperate to protect, preserve and present these lands. We need your help. Appropriate respectful behaviour by hikers will lead to a safe and rewarding experience and contribute to a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

## BACKCOUNTRY ETIQUETTE: LOW IMPACT CAMPING

**It is an offence under the Canada National Parks Act to collect, remove, destroy or deface any natural or cultural heritage resource within National Park boundaries.** This includes defacing artifacts, cutting trees for firewood or makeshift shelters and collecting or removing marine life, shellfish, fossils, artifacts, plants, etc. Leave Pacific Rim National Park Reserve in as good or better condition than you found it.

**Use a stove: minimize fires.** Do not rely on fires for cooking, staying warm or drying out. Small driftwood fires are permitted below the high tide line on beaches: fires are not permitted in the forest. Use only driftwood (no thicker than your wrist), do not cut any trees or other vegetation and keep fires away from logs. Make sure fires have burned out, or are extinguished with water, and dismantled. No trace of the fire should be left.

**Ensure safe water and health conditions: use outhouses when possible.** If you are stuck between outhouses, dig a hole 20cm (7 inch) deep, at least 30 metres (three bus lengths) away from water sources, campsites or the trail. Bury the human waste. Dispose of toilet paper in outhouses or pack it out. Pack out hygiene products.

**Wash yourself, your clothes and dishes in the ocean or at the mouth of rivers.** Dispose of any dirty water at least 30 m from drinking water sources. Use only biodegradable soap. Better yet try soap free camping.

**Schedule your hike to camp at designated campsites.** Camp on the beach above the high-tide line to reduce your impacts in the forest.

**Your actions can kill wildlife and endanger hikers.** Hang your food, garbage and toiletries out of reach of animals and away from tents. Use metal food lockers if they are available.

**Pack it in: pack it out.** There are no garbage cans on the WCT: everything you pack in you must pack out (orange peels, hygiene products, tarp ropes, wet clothes etc). Before arriving at the Trail, minimize packaging to reduce garbage and weight.

**Fishing is permitted on the WCT.** Carry the appropriate licenses (Non-Tidal Angling Licence and Tidal Waters Sports Fishing Licence) and follow the regulations and closures.

**First Nation Reserves located along the WCT are private property.** QUU'AS Guardians regularly patrol the trail and may be able to provide information about these areas. Patrol cabins are not for hikers. Stay on the main trail and obey all signs when on reserve lands. Violators will be prosecuted.

**Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.**

## **A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE TRIP**

Travel in the backcountry requires special attention to safety. Hazards are numerous. Fifty to eighty seriously injured hikers are evacuated from the WCT every season. Approximately 200 hikers per year sustain minor injuries but manage to limp off the trail. A considerable number of injuries on the WCT involve unprepared and inexperienced hikers.

**Take your time and enjoy your experience.** Many accidents and injuries occur when hikers are rushing, not paying attention to terrain, tired, or hiking too late in the day. Respect the capabilities of the slowest group members. Take adequate rest breaks and keep the group together.

**During wet, rainy weather occurrences of physical injury and hypothermia increase significantly.** Hypothermia is the lowering of the core body temperature. If not stopped symptoms can progress from slurred speech and lack of co-ordination to uncontrolled shivering to loss of consciousness and finally heart failure. Ensure your party is warm, dry and well fed.

**Assume all walking surfaces are slippery at all times, especially during damp or rainy periods.** 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.

**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. No more than two persons should be on a ladder or bridge at one time. Large groups should allow extra time to progress past ladder sections.

**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. When crossing 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 flush with the platform, and carefully unload. Do not bounce or sway the car or tie it to the platform.

**Hikers must wade across some creeks and rivers.** Be prepared for flooding rivers. 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 nighttime high tides when pitching your tent on the beach.

**Living with wildlife:** black bears, wolves and cougars use the beaches and trails of the WCT unit. All wild animals are potentially dangerous. To avoid a dangerous encounter with wildlife **stay alert and keep these points in mind:**

-Never leave food or garbage accessible to wildlife - it is an attractant.

-Keep children close to you.

-If you encounter a predator:

- face the animal and retreat slowly, giving them an avenue of escape;

- do not run or play dead.

-In the unlikely event of an attack, try to appear big and aggressive: shout, wave a stick or throw rocks.

Read the hiker advisory at the trailhead and ask staff about recent wildlife activity and how to be a partner in Living with Wildlife.

**Drinking water is available from most rivers and creeks.** Collect water upstream, then purify, boil or filter it.

**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). PSP can result in serious illness or death.

**Each hiking party is responsible for assisting injured members of their party.** If you are injured, but can hike, attempt to get off the Trail with the assistance of your party or other hikers. You should not continue hiking in the hope that your condition will improve.

If you have an 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 with the WCT Overnight Use Permit. 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 evacuate injured hikers to the nearest exit point, ambulance or medical facility. This is not necessarily the most convenient location for the injured hiker. Minor complaints such as blisters, sore feet, fatigue and lack of food do not warrant evacuation.

## EQUIPMENT

To enjoy your WCT experience you must be comfortable. Aim for quality and lightweight equipment. Your pack should weigh a maximum of 1/4 (women) to 1/3 (men) of your body weight. Reassess the content of your pack if it is heavier than this.

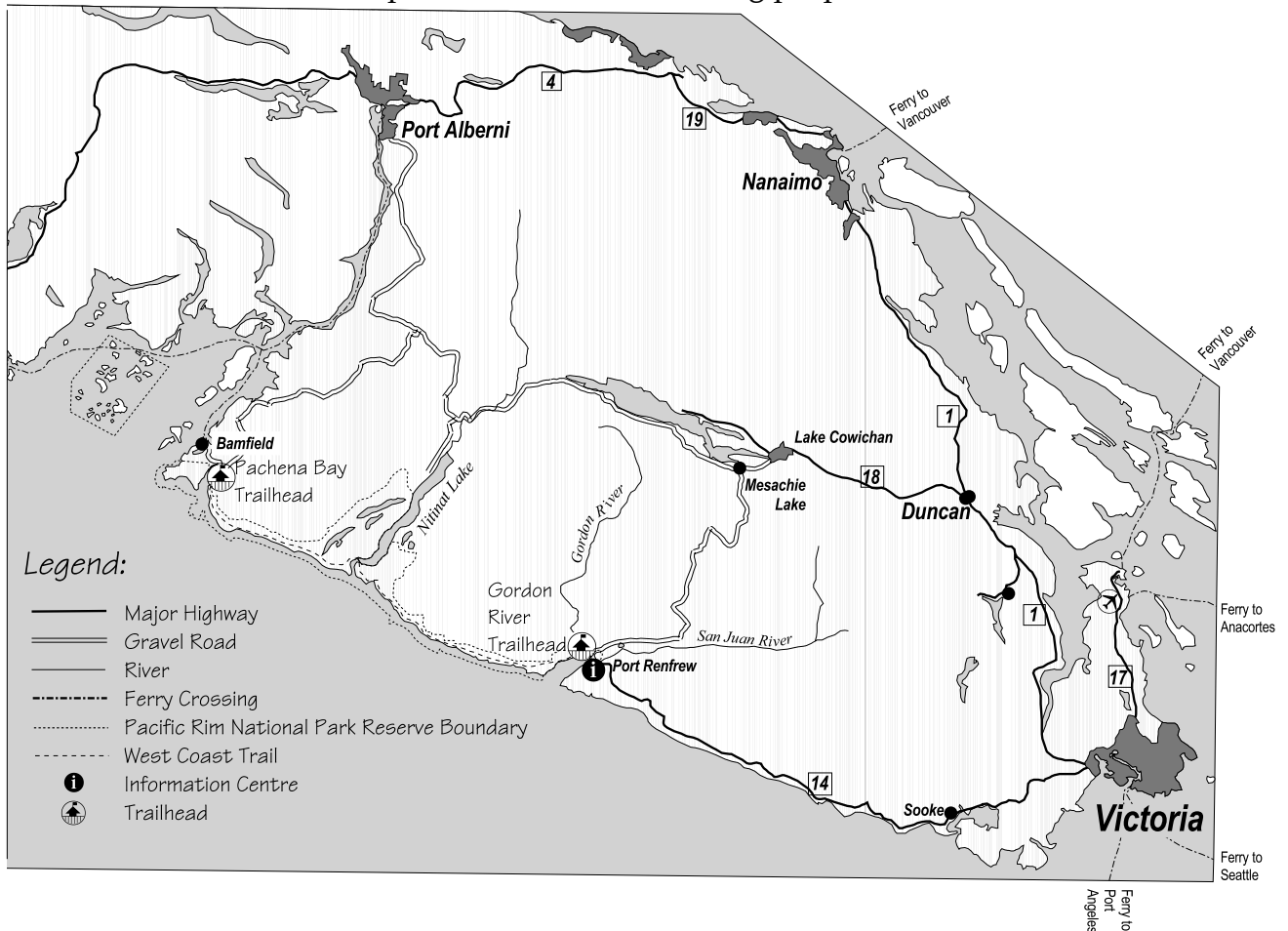
- **Sturdy boots:** High quality hiking boots with good ankle and arch support are required. Rubber soles provide better traction on slippery surfaces than hard Vibram soles. Do not break in new boots on this hike. Sandals or running shoes are good for wearing around camp and for river crossings.
- **Rainwear and clothing:** Bring durable waterproof jacket and pants, under layers that keep you warm when wet and are quick to dry, as well as a warm hat and gloves.
- **Lightweight backpacking stove and fuel.**
- **High energy, lightweight, quick-cooking food.**
- **Backpacks** require a padded hip belt and should be lined with plastic bags.
- **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.**
- **Waterproof West Coast Trail Map, Tide Tables and a watch** for use with tide tables.
- **First aid kit that includes treatments for blister and insect stings.**
- **15 meters** (50 ft) of synthetic rope per group to hang food, use as clothes-line, etc.
- **Cellular phones** work on many of the beaches. Check with your carrier to see if they have coverage in this area. Another option is a marine VHF radio.
- Also emergency signaling device, cash for unexpected emergencies (some places only take cash such as the Nitinat Lake water taxi) , water container, water purification equipment, toilet paper, zip-lock type plastic bags for keeping permits and other small items dry, lighter or waterproof matches, candles and fire starters, garbage bags to pack out all your refuse, gaiters, sun screen, lip screen, sunglasses, toiletries, flashlight, weather radio, repair kits for equipment, lightweight shoes for camp, cooking and eating utensils.
- Some hikers find a hiking staff or collapsible ski poles useful.
- **Do not bring an axe, firearms or pets!**

<b>CONTACT PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE</b>	
<b>West Coast Trail Information Centre (Pachena Bay)</b>	Phone/Fax: (250) 728-3234 Open daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., (May 1 to Oct. 5)
<b>West Coast Trail Information Centre (Gordon River)</b>	Phone: (250) 647-5434 Fax: (250) 647-0016 Open daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., (May 1 to Oct. 5)
<b>Park Administration Office</b>	2185 Ocean Terrace Road P.O. Box 280, Ucluelet, BC V0R 3A0 Phone: (250) 726-7721 (year-round)
<b>Long Beach Information Centre</b>	Phone: (250) 726-4212 Open daily June 15 – September 15
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:pacrim.info@pc.gc.ca">pacrim.info@pc.gc.ca</a>
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.pc.gc.ca/pacificrim">www.pc.gc.ca/pacificrim</a>

<b>OTHER HIKER SERVICES (effective February 2004 - subject to change)</b>	
<b>Super Natural BC</b>	Toll Free Canada/ USA 1-800-435-5622 Greater Vancouver 604-435-5622 International 250-387-1642
<b>QUU'AS West Coast Trail Group</b>	<a href="http://www.quuas.ca">www.quuas.ca</a>
<b>BC Ferries</b>	(Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo) 1-888-223-3779 or (250) 386-3431 <a href="http://www.bcferries.bc.ca">www.bcferries.bc.ca</a>
<b>Victoria Clipper - Seattle Passenger Ferry</b>	(Seattle to Victoria) 1-800-888-2535 or (250) 382-8100 <a href="http://www.victoriaclipper.com">www.victoriaclipper.com</a>
<b>West Coast Trail Express Bus</b>	1-888-999-2288 (Victoria, Nanaimo, Port Alberni Bamfield Nitinat Village, Port Renfrew)
<b>Alberni Marine Transport</b>	(250) 723-8313 (Port Alberni to Bamfield passenger ferry)
<b>Juan de Fuca Express Water Taxi</b>	(250) 755-6578 (Port Renfrew, Nitinat Narrows and Bamfield)
<b>Butch Jack Hiker Ferry Service</b>	(250) 647-5517 or 647-5521 (Gordon River Trailhead)
<b>Nitinat Lake Water Taxi</b>	(250) 745-3509 (across Nitinat Narrows and to Nitinat Village)

# SOUTHERN VANCOUVER ISLAND AND THE WEST COAST TRAIL UNIT OF PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE OF CANADA

(This map is not intended for hiking purposes)



## REFERENCES

### Available from the WCT Information Centre:

- The West Coast Trail Map. **Parks Canada 2002.**
- Canadian Tide and Current Tables 2004 Barkley Sound and Discovery Passage to Dixon Entrance. Volume 6. **Canadian Hydrographic Service. (Tofino Tide Table)**

### Guide books and videos about the WCT are available at retail outlets. Some of the more recent books:

- **Foster, D. and Aitken, W.** 2003. *Blisters and Bliss: fifth edition.* B&B Publishing Victoria, British Columbia
- **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.** 2002. *Soaring with the Eagles on Canada's West Coast Trail, fourth edition.* The University of Calgary. Calgary, Alberta