

Pacific Coast Mountains

Represented by: Pacific Rim and Gwaii Haanas
National Park Reserves

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WILD AND WET

It is from the land we get our strength,
from the sea we get our energy.

*Diane Brown (Kwakwaka'wakw)
Haida Community Health Worker*

THE LAND:

The biggest trees, the most rainfall, the longest and deepest fiords ... this region is known for Canadian superlatives. A distinctive climate and lofty mountains make this natural region stand alone, like an island, with unique plant and animal communities and living conditions.

In few other natural regions of Canada can one swim or walk through such a diversity of habitats, or experience such a variety of life, in so short a distance - from undersea kelp forests through lush rain forests to arctic conditions on mountain-top glaciers. The Coast Mountains cover most of the region, rising steeply from the fiords and channels. Mount Waddington, the highest mountain in British Columbia, is over 4,000 metres. Glaciers and snowfields cap the



Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve



West Coast Trail, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

tallest ranges. The mountains of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlottes, although not high, make up in ruggedness what they lack in elevation. The Estevan Coastal Plain, a long narrow strip of rocky coastline, indented, wave-battered and wind-scoured, separates the mountains from the sea along the west coast of Vancouver Island.

The most striking feature of this region is the maze of fiords and channels that dissect the coastline from Vancouver to Alaska. These are classic fiords, some of the world's longest and deepest. They slash inland, up to 190 kilometres, with sheer sides plunging over 2,000 metres. The deepest fiord in the world is Findlayson Channel, with soundings of over 418 fathoms (795 metres).

The region lies within the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area of high volcanic and earthquake activity caused by the movement of crustal plates. Hot springs that beckon backcountry explorers bear testimony to crustal "hot spots" found throughout this region.

Natural Region 1

VEGETATION:

The combination of heavy rainfall and year-round mild temperatures have resulted in some of the most spectacular old-growth temperate rain forests in the world. Here



South Moresby Island, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve

are the most productive forests, the biggest trees and some of the oldest trees in Canada - the Red Creek fir, a massive Douglas fir with a circumference of over 14 metres and a height of 80 metres, possibly Canada's biggest tree; the largest western red cedar, 20 metres in circumference, found on Meares Island; Carmanah Creek, site of the world's tallest sitka spruce (95metres); Cathedral Grove, dominated by Douglas fir as tall in feet as they are old in years - up to 250 feet (85 metres) and 250 years. Yet these are mere babes compared to many western red cedars, which can be over two millennia old.

Three main types of vegetation occur in Natural Region 1. The Coastal Western

Hemlock zone occurs only to about 600 metres above sea level. Douglas fir, sitka spruce, western red cedar and western hemlock are the dominant species in this zone. Between 600 metres and 900 metres above sea level is the sub-alpine mountain hemlock zone dominated by mountain hemlock and yellow cedar. As the elevation increases, the green cloak of evergreen forest begins to break up into krummholz - stunted clumps of trees. Above 900 metres is the third vegetation zone - treeless alpine tundra.

WILDLIFE:

The mainland coast of Natural Region 1 is a stronghold for grizzly bears, which feed heavily on salmon migrating to their spawning streams. Cougar, wolf, black bear, martin, black-tailed deer (a sub-species of mule deer), wapiti (elk), mountain goat,

wolverine and fisher are some of the larger denizens of this region. Several endemic sub-species and species of wildlife have evolved on the islands of this region: the Vancouver Island marmot, found only in alpine meadows on Vancouver Island; the "blond" or "kermodei" bear, a pale sub-species of black bear found

on a few north coastal islands; the Roosevelt elk, among others. Some of these endemics are rare or endangered; others, such as the Dawson caribou, once confined to Graham Island in the Queen Charlotte Islands, are now extinct.



Bald Eagle

Natural Region 1

The marine environment of this region supports an abundance of life unrivalled in Canada. Many large seabird colonies, some with populations of global significance, are found on islands along the coast of this region. Bald eagles are a common sight along the coast. The region's estuaries, rocky shorelines and beaches provide critical habitat for countless migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, including the trumpeter swan and sandhill crane.

STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

This region is represented by Pacific Rim National Park Reserve (500 km²) and Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve (1,495 km²). Pacific Rim, representing the Estevan Coastal Plain portion of this region, is divided into three distinct units: Long Beach, a strip of uninterrupted surf-pounded beach backed by rain forest and including a marine component extending to the 10-fathom line; the Broken Group Islands, consisting of over 100 islands in a marine component; and a narrow strip along 77 kilometres of coastline that includes the challenging West Coast Trail and an inland wilderness watershed known as the Nitinat Triangle.

The first federal-provincial agreement for Pacific Rim was signed in 1970. This agreement was re-negotiated in 1987. Because the area is subject to the comprehensive claim of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and the Ditidaht First Nation, it will be proclaimed as a national park reserve under the National Parks Act, pending the resolution of this claim.

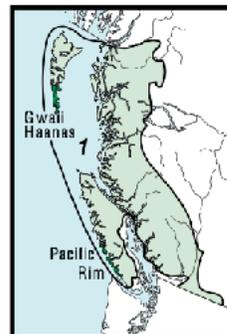
Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, encompassing the rain forests and alpine meadows of the southern Queen Charlotte

Islands, harbours 39 species of plants and animals not found anywhere else on the globe. Gwaii Haanas, which means "islands of wonder and beauty", is the Haida name for this wilderness archipelago of 138 islands. Accessible only by boat or aircraft, this diverse area harbours over one-quarter of B.C.'s nesting seabirds, high concentrations of bald eagles and peregrine falcons, and Canada's largest sea lion rookery. Vegetation varies from endemic plants of the alpine meadows of the rugged San Christoval Mountains to the towering sitka spruce of coastal rain forests. The interplay of land and marine environments, coupled with the abundance of Haida heritage features, distinguishes this park reserve. The Haida legacy includes the historical village of Ninstant on Anthony Island, a UNESCO cultural World Heritage Site, as well as over 100 inventoried archaeological sites of an estimated total in excess of 450.

A federal-provincial agreement was signed in 1988 committing Canada and British Columbia to create a national park and an adjacent national marine conservation area. Recognizing that the area falls within the

traditional territory of the Haida Nation that will be subject to treaty negotiation, an agreement was negotiated between Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation related to sharing in planning, operation and management. The National Parks Act is in the process of being amended to establish the

national park reserve consistent with the above-mentioned agreements.





If you wonder about the origin of all these mountains, you can check out a video by the Geologic Survey of Canada called Where Terranes Collide. It explains the complex geology of western Canada, and why each of the Natural Regions I describe is unique.



Rob Gardner

Major Land Uses
Logging - lumber and pulp
Fishing - salmon and others

Main Communities
Prince Rupert
Squamish
Bella Coola

Aboriginal Peoples
Haida, Gitksan, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Kwakiutl, Nuu-chah-nulth

Parks and Natural Areas
Pacific Rim National Park
Gwaii Haanas National Park
Garibaldi Provincial Park

Further Information

Garibaldi Lake. The steep trail up from the valley (below) takes hikers from the moist red cedar forest of the lower slopes all the way to alpine meadows..



Rob Gardner



Roger Moses

The very old totem poles above are located at S'Gang Gwaay Lianagaay World Heritage Site, formerly called Ninstints Village, on the east side of Anthony Island. The poles are intended to gradually return to the soil. For almost a century, the carving of new totem poles, and other ceremonies, were declared illegal by the federal government. In the 1970s, the ceremonial carving was revived (below).

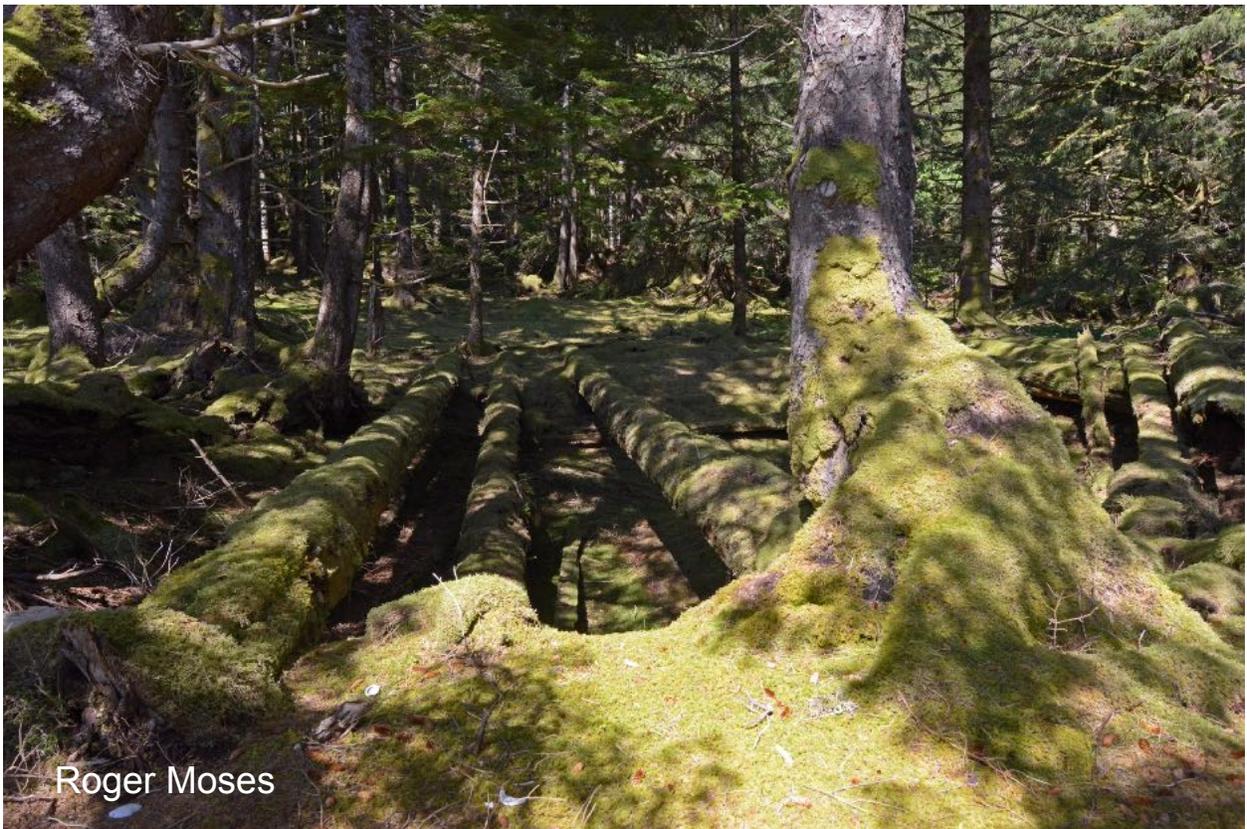


Roger Moses



Roger Moses

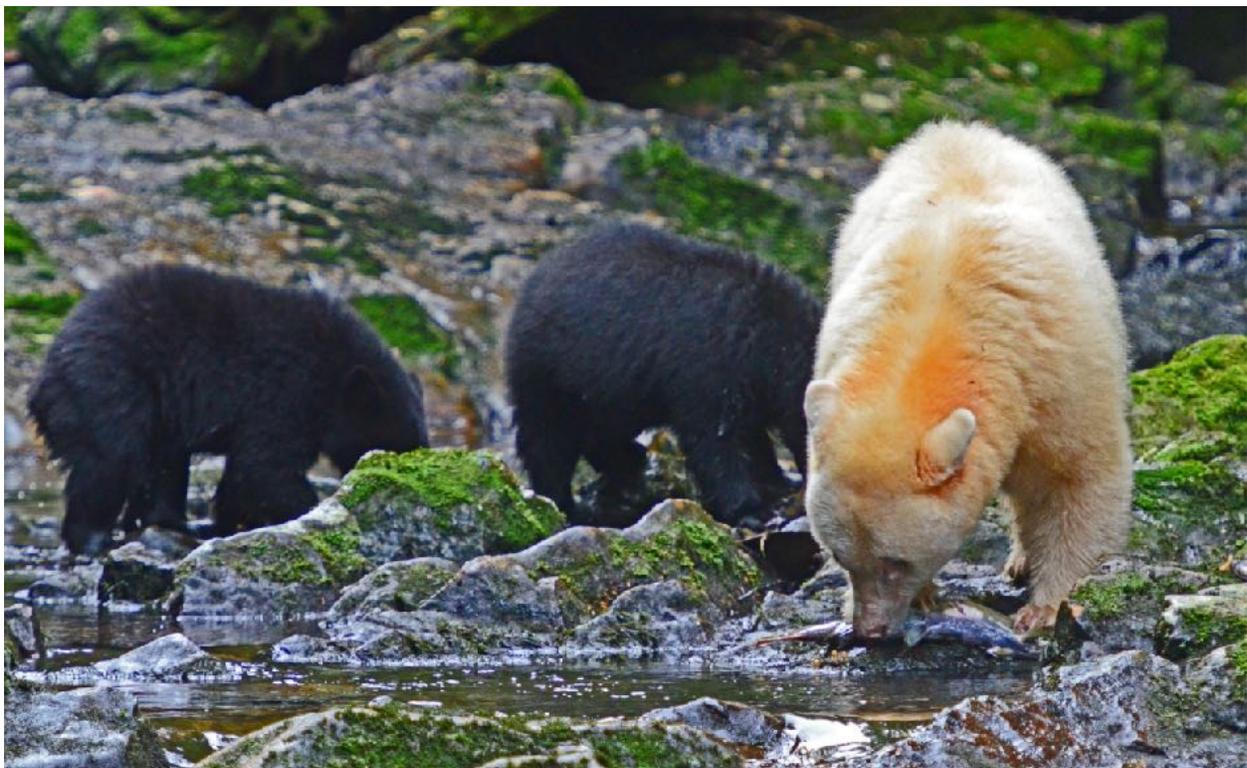
Humpback whales patrol the coastline, seeking schools of small fish. At times, these giants were themselves harvested by the coastal peoples paddling large canoes. On land, thick layers of moss cover slowly rotting fallen trees.



Roger Moses



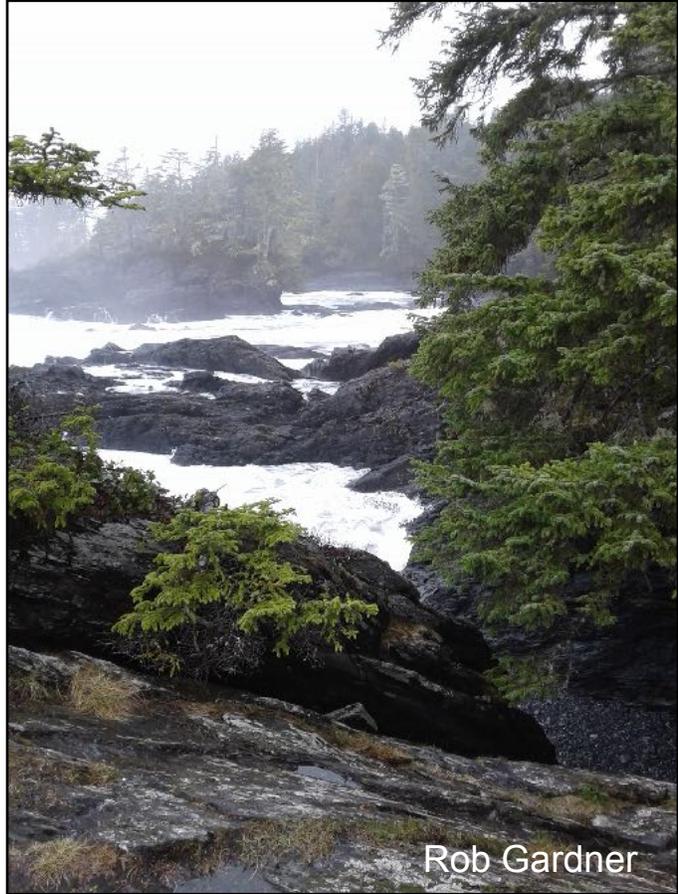
Salmon form the base of the food chain and the foundation of the indigenous cultures. With each species of salmon migrating up the rivers at a different season, bears, eagles and other fish eaters have an easy time finding food. These animals fertilize the forest by carrying nutrients from the fish away from the streams. The Great Bear Rainforest, is home to blond-coloured black bears, known as Spirit Bears.





Rob Gardner

Driving along the rugged coast past Victoria, you reach Port Renfrew at the end of the road.



Waves crash onto the west coast, making it a popular surfing location. (Of course, this only became popular after wet suits were developed.) Long Beach at Tofino (pictured here) is the best-known location.





Rob Gardner

At Port Renfrew, towering evergreens draped with lichens shade a ground cover of spongy mosses. One of the rainiest places in Canada, the forest redefines what “green” means!



Rob Gardner



With mountains like these towering a thousand metres over the ocean, people can go water skiing in the morning and snow skiing in the afternoon. What a country!

Cut blocks of various ages give evidence of forestry being a powerful economic force.



