

A vibrant photograph of a waterfall in a lush forest. The water is white and frothy as it falls over dark, moss-covered rocks. The surrounding trees and foliage are a deep green, with some mossy branches hanging over the water. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the falls.

# *Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island*

by Kim Parcher



# Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island



Kim Parcher

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Created on Vancouver Island.

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## Introduction

Vancouver Island has so many gems to explore, however many are not easy to find (unless you know who to ask!). In the following pages, you will discover some of the very best (and a few of the most secret) finds on Vancouver Island.

Some of these hidden gems require a bit of a walk or hike to get there, while others you can pretty much just park and explore.

A few of the trails and/or roads leading to the hidden gems are unmarked and require some good navigational skills, so please try to follow the directions given. Unless, of course, you enjoy getting lost...often times we discover the most remarkable finds when we don't know exactly where we are going!

Due to the fact that Vancouver Island has so many of these amazing hidden gems, this e-book will focus on the Mid-Island only (Ladysmith to the Comox Valley).

My hope is that you will utilize this e-book to inspire you to get out there and see a part of Vancouver Island that is a little off the beaten path (and often not so frequently known).



### Frequently Asked Questions

Have you already written about these Hidden Gems on Vancouver Island View?

Some of them, yes. Our most popular post of all time remains to be the one titled [Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island](#). The popularity of that post prompted me to expand on the idea and write this e-book. So, think of this e-book as a guide to the best hidden gems on Vancouver Island, all wrapped up into one neat little package!

Why don't you mention whether or not the trails are "Kid Friendly"?

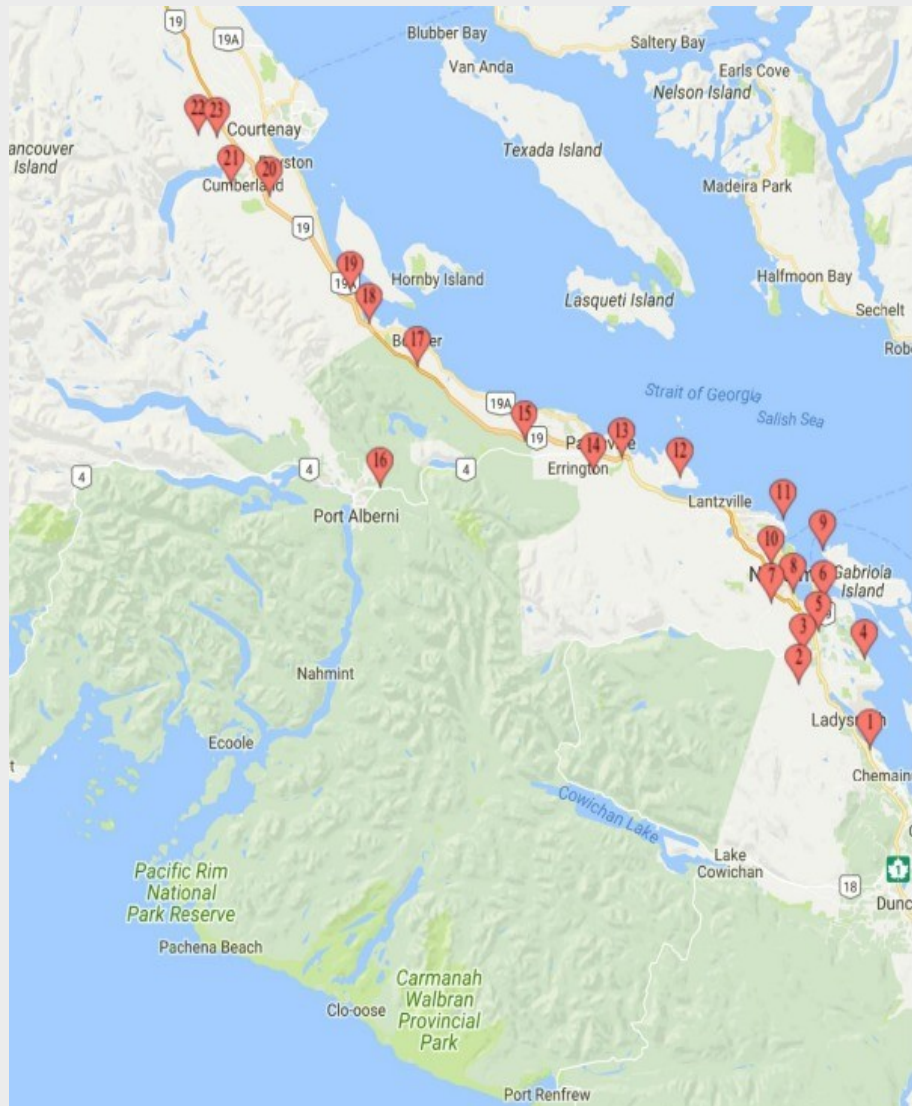
We take our kids (currently ages 8 and 11) on every hike, and always have. So each hike I mention has been kid approved. While I can't say there hasn't been whining and complaining while trekking on a few of the (longer) trails mentioned, they managed to pull through. If there is ever a trail (or part of a trail) that I feel is too steep and not suitable for children, I have noted it as such.

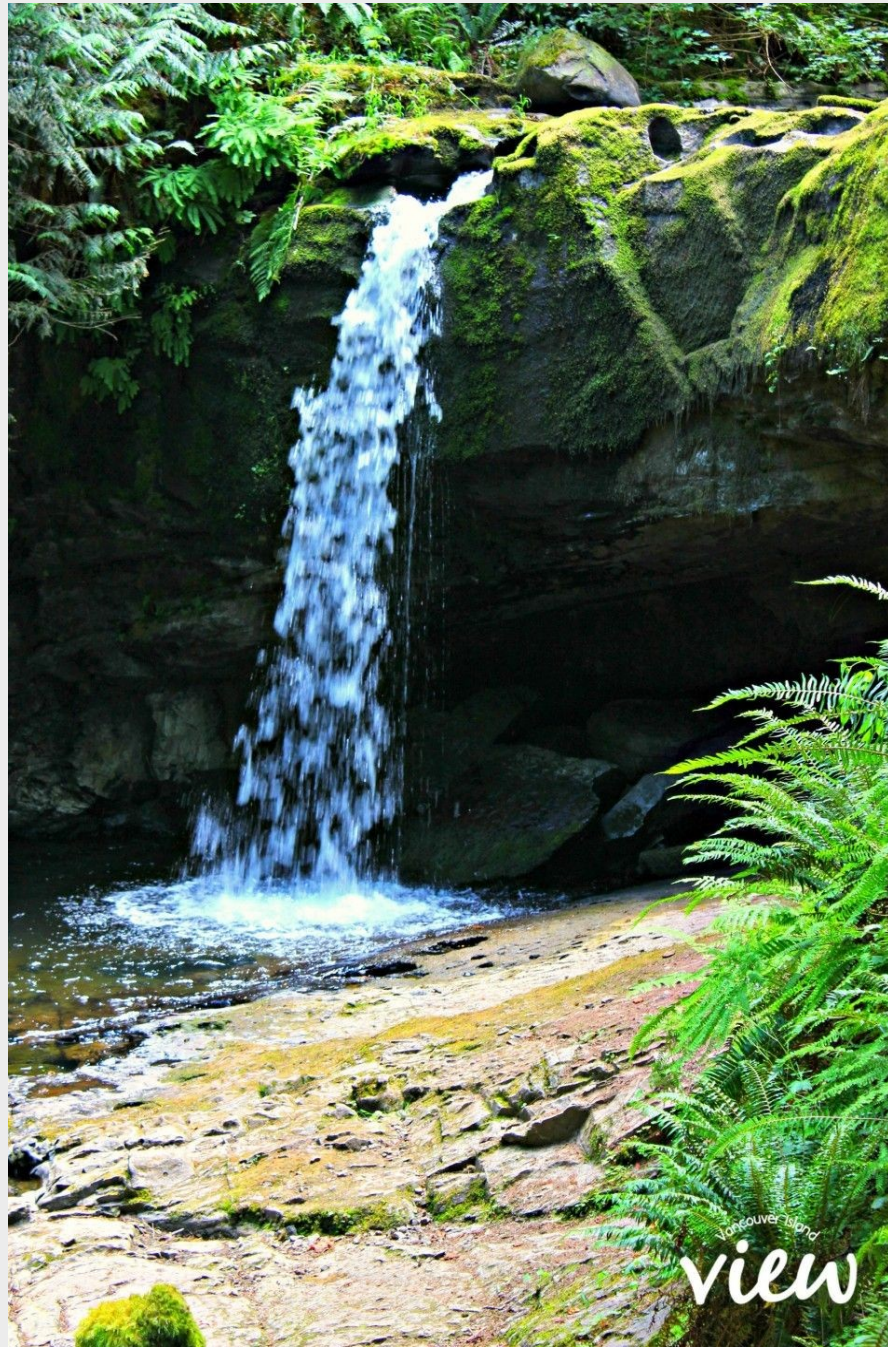
Why do you direct us through Private Land?

Private forest lands make up 23% of the land base on Vancouver Island. And, unfortunately, many of Vancouver Island's greatest assets (and hidden gems) are found by accessing these lands. Although many of the private land owners are aware that this happens, we still need to be mindful that this privilege could just as easily be taken away from us if not respected. This means when walking through private land we leave no trace. We take out what we brought in and treat their land with the utmost respect. As for Vancouver Island View's involvement, please remember, that I am providing you with an information service only. What you do with that information is entirely up to you, and you do so at your own risk.

## Map Overview

Click on the image below to link you to a customized map overview of all the hidden gems mentioned within this e-book. You will also find that each section and location featured within this e-book has it's very own Google Map link for ease of use.





## Stocking Creek Falls

Location: Saltair



Tucked at the end of an unmarked road in Saltair, you will find Stocking Creek Park. A short walk through the trails of this delightful park will lead you to a beautiful waterfall and flowing creek.

A portion of this trail is also part of the Trans Canada Trail. So, if you are looking for a longer walk, there are many more places to wander.

### Getting There

From the Inland Island Highway, turn onto Chemainus Road in Saltair. Continue along this road and watch for Byron's Store. After you pass this store, look for a small blue sign that reads "Stocking Creek Park". It will be attached to a pole on an unmarked road that looks more like a driveway. Follow this road to the parking lot.

A word about this unmarked road. When looking at Stocking Creek Trail on Google Maps, this unmarked road is called Thicke Road. However, using your GPS to Thicke Road will lead you to the other side of the Highway, with no access to the park.

An alternate access point and parking area to Stocking Creek Park is on Finch Place, which is off of Gait Road. The trail leading from this area will eventually get you to the same waterfall trail, but it's a bit more of a walk.

### Trail Directions

From the parking area at the end of the unmarked road you will see a well-maintained trail ahead of you. Once on that trail, go left and walk over the bridge. Continue up the hill and stay right when the trail splits. Watch for a sign on your right hand side indicating the trail to the waterfall.

[Google Map Link of Stocking Creek Park Trail.](#)

## Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The trail is very well-maintained, and there are definitely portions of it that would be suitable for wheelchairs and/or strollers. However, the trail that leads down to the waterfall is full of stairs and relatively steep.

## Dog Friendly?

The trail is definitely dog friendly! We saw lots of dogs while at the park, some were even off-leash.

## Length of Trail

It's a short walk from the parking lot to the waterfall. I'd say under 1 km, or a 10 – 15 minute walk. As mentioned above, there are also many other trails to walk on, if you wish to continue. As well, the Stocking Creek Trail does a full loop. The entire park is 15.66 hectares.







## Haslam Creek Suspension Bridge

**Location: South Nanaimo**

(Near the Nanaimo Airport)



The Haslam Creek Suspension Bridge is part of the Trans Canada Trail, but luckily for us you don't need to walk the entire trail to experience this really cool feature! The trail leading to the bridge is a nice easy, beautiful walk. In fact, the only tricky part about finding the bridge is the drive getting there.

### Getting There

The first step is to head to the Nanaimo airport, and turn onto Timberlands Road. If you are coming from the South (Ladysmith), you will be turning left onto Timberlands road. Alternatively, if you are coming from Nanaimo, you will be turning right. Keep following Timberlands Road past Rondalyn Resort, which will put you on a gravel logging road. Once on the gravel logging road, you will come to a gate that says "Do Not Enter". Don't second guess yourself, and keep going past that sign!

You will enter into what looks like a gravel pit with a bunch of equipment and vehicles. Take the second right (the first right will be set back a bit just after the fenced-in area). Follow along the fence line until you see a small trail marker for the Trans Canada Trail hidden in the trees. (If you aren't following a fence line then you are on the wrong gravel road).

There is no designated parking area, so just pull your vehicle off to a safe place on the side of the gravel road.

[Google Map Link of the Haslam Creek Trail.](#)

**IMPORTANT INFO:** The gate that you must cross through (the one that says "Do Not Enter") closes at 6:00 PM. Any vehicle that is in the area after 6:00 PM will be locked inside!!

## Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

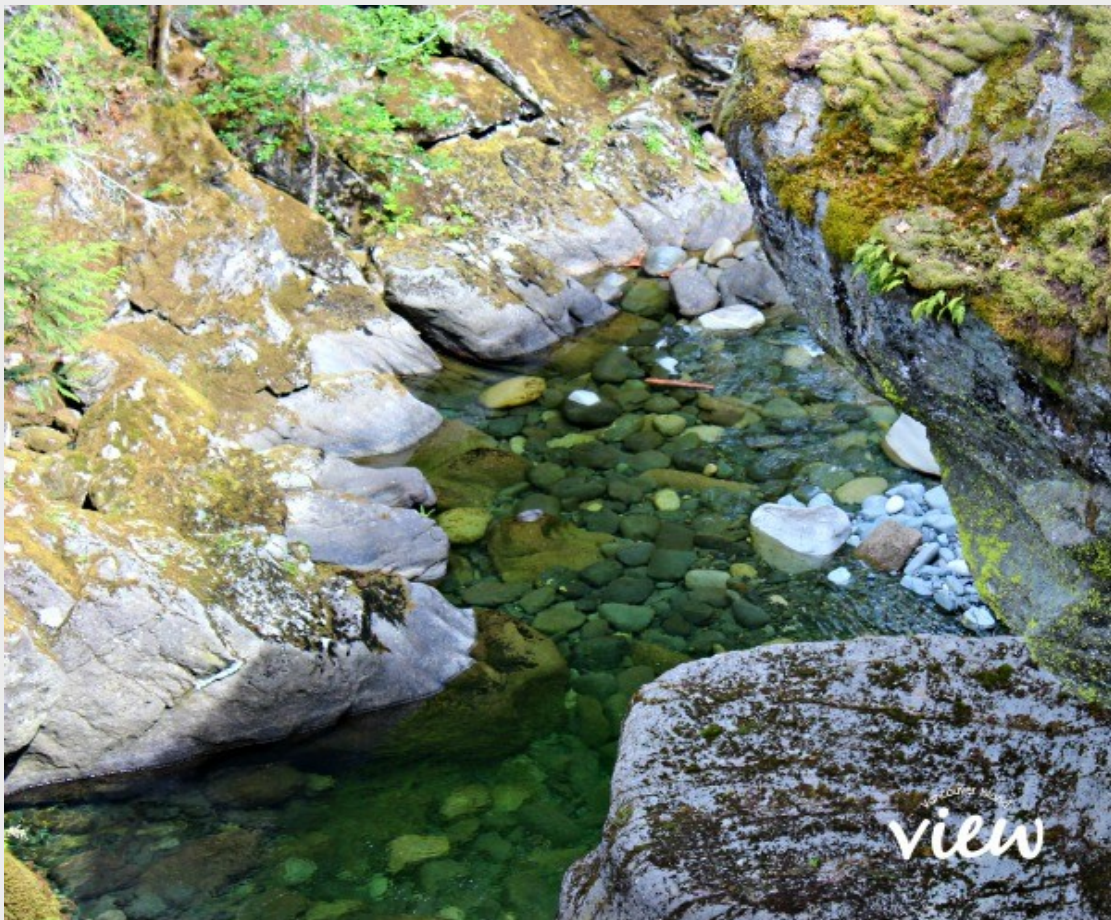
The trail to the suspension bridge is very well maintained and flat, however there are a few large rocks and tree roots along the way. So my suggestion is to use something with big wheels.

## Dog Friendly?

The trail is dog friendly, but there are no garbage cans available for cleaning up after your dog.

## Length of Trail

The trail that leads to the suspension bridge is an easy 1.2 kilometers. Once you cross the bridge you can continue walking along the Trans Canada Trail for approximately 2.5 hours towards Spruston Road (if you wish). Much of this hike is on back roads. You will find maps on the other side of the bridge of the surrounding trails.







## The Dark Side

Location: South Nanaimo  
(Near the Nanaimo Airport)



## Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island - The Dark Side

The hike starts off at a beautiful spot with a view of the Nanaimo River below you.

The trail follows the south side of the river upstream, in a meandering sort of way. It then leads down into a canyon, and that's when the real fun begins!

There are large boulders that need to be passed under and over, two short bridges to cross, narrow paths to meander, and ladders to climb. And while the infrastructures are cool, the scenery is simply amazing. Make sure to take the time to enjoy your surroundings!



## Getting There

From Highway #1, take Spruston Road (near Cassidy). Turn right on Riverbend Road and follow it to the very end. You will see a gravel parking area underneath the power lines. After parking, walk west (upriver) along the trail that stays on top of the southern edge of the river bank. As mentioned above, the trail eventually leads down into a canyon.

[Google Map Link to the Dark Side.](#)

## Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

Due to the ladders, small bridges, and large boulders one must pass over, this trail is unfortunately not stroller or wheelchair friendly.

## Dog Friendly?

This hike is NOT suitable for dogs! If you insist on bringing your dog, you will be required to carry him/her up and down the steep ladders.

## Length of Trail

The trail is quite short (only about 1 km), but the area is so full of interesting things that you can literally explore it for hours! As far as we could tell, the trail doesn't really have an end point. It kind of just peters out and becomes quite unmaintained and unpassable at around the 1 km mark.

When you get to this particular point, head down towards the river and utilize the large boulders in front of you to sit and enjoy the view.



Roberts Memorial Park

Location: Yellow Point



A short walk through a grove of Douglas Fir trees takes you to a unique rocky shoreline of sandstone ledges and tidal pools. This area is part of the geological heritage of Vancouver Island and represents ancient sea beds.

The rocky beach offers great opportunities for wildlife viewing. During the summer, seals and otters often bask in the sun on the sandstone ledges. While Great Blue Herons, Bald Eagles and a variety of seabirds can be spotted at almost any time of year.

### Getting There

Roberts Memorial Park is located 15 km south of Nanaimo. Take the Cedar Road exit from Hwy 1 and then turn onto Yellowpoint Road. Follow signs to the park.

[Google Map Link to Roberts Memorial Park.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

The trail is nice and wide, but there are a few large roots along the way. There is also a section of the trail where you are required to walk over large flat rocks (that can be quite slippery at times). Once you get down to the shoreline the sandstone is shelved and bumpy.

### Dog Friendly?

This is a Provincial Park, so dogs must stay on a leash, but there are garbage cans located in the parking area to dispose of any bagged waste.

### Length of Trail

The trail is approximately 1 km long (one way) and should take you about 15 - 20 minutes to get down to the shoreline.



## Morden Colliery Historic Provincial Park

Location: Cedar area



At only 4 hectares this small Provincial Park offers a unique glimpse into the world of mining. In 1912 there was a working coal mine at this very spot. What remains today, behind the safety of a fence, is the only coal tibble left on Vancouver Island.

The large mining artifacts are visible right from the parking lot. There is a short trail to the left of the large structures called the 'mining trail' that goes around the artifacts. While the trail to the right leads down to the Nanaimo river.

### Getting There

This park is located in the South Wellington area. From Highway 1, take the Morden Road exit (turning left off the hwy, if you are coming from the Nanaimo side). The parking area is found at the very end of this road.

[Google Map Link to Morden Colliery Historic Provincial Park](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The mining artifacts can be seen right from the parking area, so yes, this gem is definitely stroller and/or wheelchair accessible. The trail that leads down to the Nanaimo River is as well.

### Dog-Friendly?

This is a Provincial Park, so dogs must be on a leash at all times.

### Length of Trail

As mentioned above, the structures are visible from the parking lot, but if you wanted to continue, the trail that leads down to the river is 1.2 km.



## The Arboretum

Location: South Nanaimo

(Near the Duke Point Ferry Terminal)



The **H.R. MacMillan Grant Ainscough Arboretum** is an unofficial park owned by the Regional District of Nanaimo.

This 2.6-hectare site used to attract university tour groups from across the province, who wanted to study the behaviour and growth of exotic trees. What's left is 150 species of trees that are now maintained and monitored by the Regional District, as well as volunteers. Each unique species of tree has an interpretive sign giving details of its origin.

This relatively unknown gem is a beautiful spot for a picnic. There is a very nice picnic bench overlooking the valley for you to use, or bring a blanket and stretch out under the shade of the trees.

### Getting There

From Highway 1 in South Nanaimo, take the Duke Point Highway. Follow the signs to Jack Point & Biggs Park, by turning right at Maughan Road. Turn right onto Phoenix Way, and then immediately turn right again.

You will see a yellow gate and a sign for the park. If the gate is open when you arrive there is a small parking lot to your right. If not, park somewhere near the gate.

[Google Map Link to The Arboretum.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The entire area is grassy (there are no designated paths), so I would suggest something with good wheels. If the gate is closed, however (as it was the day I went to take the pictures), then a wheelchair and/or stroller may not fit through the walking entrance.

### Dog-Friendly?

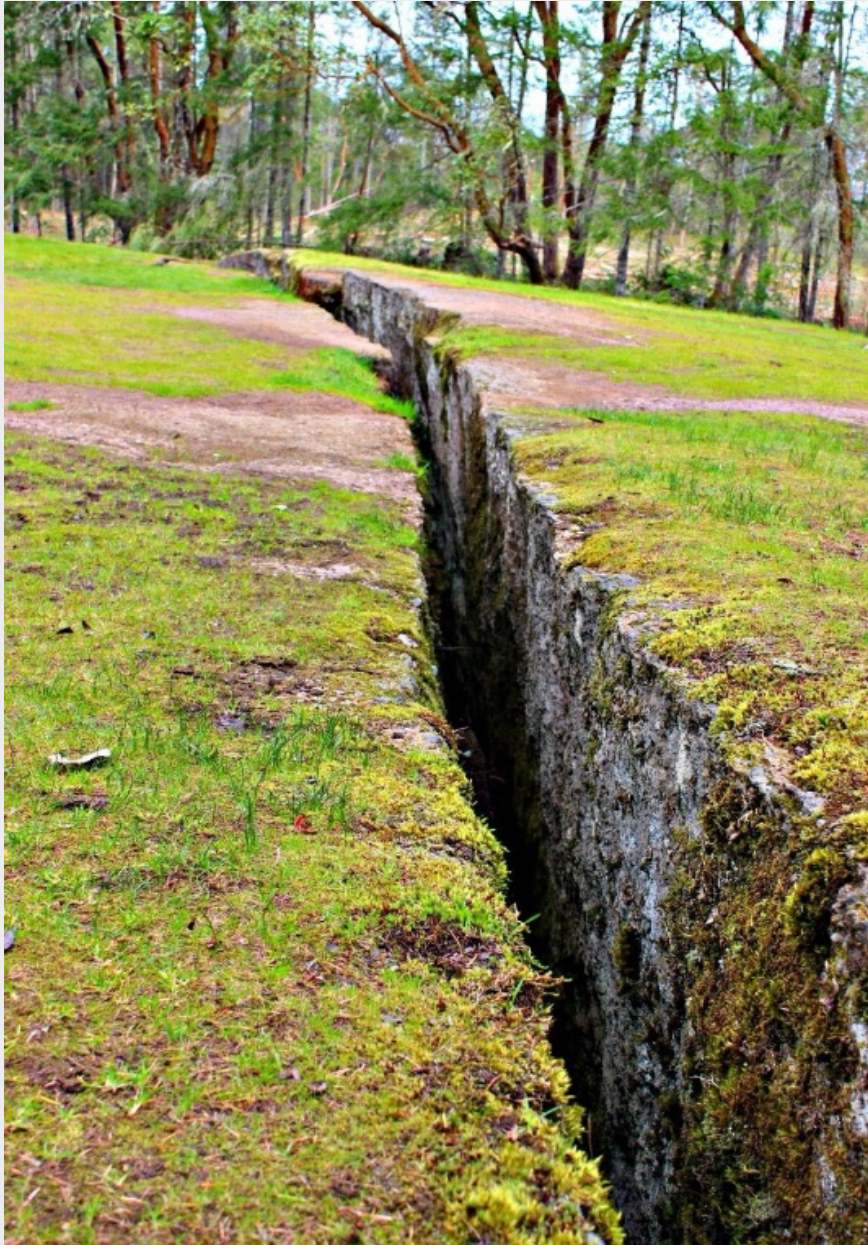
The Arboretum is owned by the Regional District of Nanaimo, and they advise to keep dogs on a leash. I will say this, however, there was no one else around the day I went, as it's not a very well-known spot. So I will leave that up to your discretion (and interpretation). Please note, though, there are no garbage cans nor waste bags available. Regardless, if you are bringing a dog, please clean up after it so the rest of us can enjoy the beautiful surroundings too!

### Length of Trail

The picnic bench can be found to the right of the park, shortly after the entrance, while the majority of the trees are to the left. There are no designated walking trails. It's just a beautiful grassy area full of unique trees.







Extension Ridge AKA - The Abyss

Location: South Nanaimo

Extension Ridge is known locally as 'The Abyss' because of a 16 inch earthquake fissure found there. Although not much is known about this large crack in the earth, there is speculation that it could be a result of a collapsed mine tunnel that was triggered by an earthquake years ago. To date there is no information about how deep the crack is.

### Getting There

The trailhead can be found on Harewood Mines Road. There is a small parking area under the power lines, and a large sign to let you know you have arrived at Extension Ridge. Head up the trail (under the power lines) for approximately 100 meters, and climb the stairs. Keeping right, continue to follow the trail for approximately 15 minutes to reach the earthquake fissure. You will pass a clear-cut on your left-hand side. There are a few rocks to scale along the trail, but not difficult, unless wet (and slippery).

[Google Map Link to The Abyss.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The trail is fairly steep, and as mentioned there are a few rocks to scale before you reach The Abyss, so this particular trail is **not** stroller or wheelchair friendly.

### Dog Friendly?

The Extension Ridge trail is part of the Trans Canada Trail, as well as a Regional District of Nanaimo trail, so it is recommended that dogs stay on a leash.

### Length of Trail

It takes approximately 15 minutes to get to The Abyss, but the trail continues on for those that wish to go further.





## Petroglyph Provincial Park

Location: South Nanaimo



Petroglyph Provincial Park in south Nanaimo has the most concentrated collection of rock art on Vancouver Island created by previous generations.

A clearly marked trail will lead you through the park to view the petroglyphs. There are information boards that offer details about the history of the area, and help to decipher the petroglyphs.

If you bring a large piece of paper with you, visitors can make their own petroglyph rubbings as a souvenir using the replicas near the beginning of the trail. The real petroglyphs are scattered around the small park and are often hard to see. The highest concentration is near the end of the short paved trail, but again, you really have to search for them. Many of them are moss covered.

### Getting There

Petroglyph Provincial Park is found off Highway #1 in South Nanaimo. Access to the park is via a pull-off from Hwy 1 on the right hand side of the road if you are coming from the south (Ladysmith). Watch for signs. The park comes up quickly after the exit to Haliburton Street. There is a large parking area at the trailhead.

[Google Map Link to Petroglyph Provincial Park.](#)

**Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?** Yes! There is a well-maintained trail in the park, some of which is paved, and it's a very short walk.

### Dog Friendly?

There are no signs saying you can't bring your dog, but please stay on the marked trails to protect the petroglyphs. And as always, please pick up after your dog. You might want to note, however, that there are no garbage cans available at this park.

**Length of Trail:** The entire trail is less than a 5 minute walk. You spend more time looking and searching than you do walking.





## Malaspina Galleries

Location: Gabriola Island



The sandstone rocks along the Gabriola coastline have been eroded over time by frost, wind and surf, creating a unique effect. It almost feels as if you are walking underneath a very large frozen wave.

It's an amazing spot to watch the sunset, for you have an almost 360 degree view of Vancouver Island as well as the coastal mountains off in the distance. In order to see the formations in all their glory, it's advised to go when the tide is out.

### Getting There

The first step is taking the ferry over to Gabriola Island. The Gabriola Ferry Terminal is located off of Front Street in downtown Nanaimo. The crossing is approximately 20 - 25 minutes, and runs daily approximately once per hour. Click on the BC Ferry link below for the Gabriola schedule.

[BC Ferry Gabriola Schedule.](#)

Once on Gabriola, take the first left off the ferry onto Taylor Bay Road. Drive this road until you come to Malaspina Drive and hang a left. You can park at the end. From there, follow the trail to the ocean and head around the point.

[Google Map Link to Malaspina Galleries.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

While the trail to the rock formations is short, the rocks themselves are quite uneven. With this in mind, I would not recommend a stroller or wheelchair on this particular outing.

**Dog Friendly?** This isn't the best area for dogs. The open ocean is right beside you, and the rock formations you are walking on are uneven and full of holes.

**Length of Trail:** The entire walk is only about 1 km. But plan on staying awhile to really enjoy your surroundings, as well as the rest of Gabriola Island.



## Buttertubs Marsh Park

Location: Mid-Nanaimo

Buttertubs Marsh is a bird and wildlife sanctuary just minutes from downtown Nanaimo. Spend an hour or so meandering along the flat and easy gravel trail, making sure to stop every once and awhile to enjoy the view.

There are several observation decks, as well as a tower, for bird watching and viewing the body of water buzzing with activity. Keep on the look out for turtles, frogs, heron, and red-winged blackbirds (plus a variety of other birds I have no names for) that frequent the area.

### Getting There

The main entrance is off of 2nd Street (which is off of Jingle Pot Road). However, there is more parking available off the entrance of Buttertubs Drive.

[Google Map Link to Buttertubs Marsh.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

Although the trail around the marsh is wide and flat, there are narrow entry gates to prevent motorized vehicles from entering the marsh. These gates might make it difficult to enter and exit with a stroller or wheelchair if it doesn't fold up small enough. It might be good to note that bicycles aren't allowed in this park.

### Dog Friendly?

No dogs are allowed in this park.

### Length of Trail

This trail is a 2 kilometre loop.





## Shack Island

Location: North Nanaimo

A unique place to beach comb is Shack Island. This remote little island is accessible by boat from Nanaimo, or by foot from **Pipers Lagoon** when the tide is out. Shack Island is owned by the municipality, but the cabins on the island are all privately owned.

The “shacks” were built in the 1930’s and 1940’s by local fishermen as holiday cabins, and have been passed down through families over the years. Although they look like they are uninhabited, they are still used today as summer cabins, and lovingly maintained by the families who own them. So if you do venture here, please be respectful of the properties.

### Getting There

Pipers Lagoon can be reached by two entry points. The one closest to Shack Island is at the end of Lagoon Drive (off Hammond Bay Road). For a longer walk through Pipers Lagoon, park in the parking lot at the end of Place road (your first right off of Lagoon Drive). Remember, though, Shack Island is only accessible when the tide is out, so don’t forget to check the [tide schedule](#) before trying to venture there.

[Google Map Link to Pipers Lagoon.](#)

**Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?:** Unfortunately, no. The beach around Shack Island is very rocky, and due to the fact it’s covered in water the majority of the time, it is also very mucky!

### Dog-Friendly?

When at Pipers Lagoon, dogs must remain on a leash at all times. Shack Island has resident Canadian geese, so it is advised to keep dogs on a leash while scouring the island as well.

### Length of Trail

The trail from the start of Pipers Lagoon (off Place Road) to the strip of land between it and Shack Island takes approximately 15 minutes to walk. If the tide is out, expect another 10 minute walk to Shack Island.





## Notch Hill

Location: Nanoose Bay



The trail that leads up Notch Hill has incredible views of the surrounding land and waters. It's also home to an impressive Gary Oak ecosystem, as well as an Arbutus grove.

This one is definitely a hike, and will get your heart pumping. However it is also relatively short. It's a climb of 240 meters (787 feet) to the top, but it shouldn't take you more than 30 minutes.

### Getting There

Notch Hill is located off of Powder Point Road, which turns into Fairwinds Drive.

Turn off at Northwest Bay Road from the Island Highway (Hwy 19). There will be a Petro-Can gas station on the corner. Turn right off of Northwest Bay Road onto Powder Point Road. Once you reach the four-way stop, Powder Point Road becomes Fairwinds Drive. Look for a well-marked sign on the right-hand side of the road indicating your arrival at the Notch Hill parking area.

[Google Map Link to Notch Hill.](#)

### Trail Directions

Take the trail that leads you past a small water control shed and larger water reservoirs. After that the trail forks. While both trails lead to the top, the trail on the right is a little less strenuous.

### Dog Friendly?

Yes, this area is dog friendly. There are waste bags and garbage cans available at the start of the trail.

### Length of Trail

The total hike there and back is approximately 3 km.



## Top Bridge

Location: Parksville



# Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island - Top Bridge

Top Bridge is one of my favourite areas to explore. The magnificent suspension bridge spans the beautiful Englishman River and connects many fantastic walking and biking trails. But it's also a great place to sit and enjoy the view, or swim in the many pools.

## Getting There

Top Bridge Regional Trail has several access points. If you are just interested in viewing the suspension bridge, the quickest access point is at the end of Chattell Road. Head just past the truck scales on Highway 19A, and continue past the four-way stop which puts you onto Kaye Road. Turn right onto Chattell Road and continue to the end. You will see the suspension bridge from the large parking area.

[Google Map Link to Top Bridge.](#)

## Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

As mentioned above, the Top Bridge Suspension Bridge is viewable right from the parking area. The bridge itself has barricades on either end to prevent motorbikes and the like from entering, which, unfortunately, may also prevent stroller and/or wheelchair access as well. The many trails surrounding the bridge are also either quite steep or have stairs, making this area not very wheelchair or stroller friendly.

## Dog Friendly?

This is a Regional Park, so dogs must stay on a leash.

## Length of Trail

As mentioned above, parking at the end of Chattell road puts you right at the bridge. However, there are many surrounding beautiful trails to walk on, if you wish.





## Triple Falls

Location: Errington

The name of this waterfall is a bit misleading, for one expects to see three separate falls, which is not the case. Regardless, there are definitely two beauties.

This area is surrounded by private property, and in order to access the falls, you are required to walk through some of it. Please be respectful at all times.

### Getting There

There is a series of lefts and rights, so follow along closely.

### Driving Directions

- From the Alberni Hwy (Hwy 4A), turn onto Bellevue Road
- Then take a right onto Ruffles
- After a 90° turn, Ruffles becomes Leffler
- From Leffler, turn left on Middlegate Road
- Turn right on Sierra Road, which ends in a gravel cul-de-sac
- There will be a narrow trail that leads out from this cul-de-sac

[Google Map Link to Sierra Road.](#)

### Trail Directions

Follow the narrow trail until it joins a wider track. Keep to your far right when the wider track splits (you will pass a small building). Continue walking down the hill for approximately 10 minutes to the first set of falls.

The first waterfall is located off to your left, on a beaten trail that leads down another small hill. This one has a series of small drops and natural rock ledges perfect for sitting on.

The upper falls is further along the main trail.

## Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The trail is well-maintained, and short, but quite steep. I personally wouldn't want to push a wheel-chair or stroller back up the hill.

## Dog Friendly?

There were no signs indicating whether or not it is a dog friendly area, however, please remember, for the most part you are walking on private property. So please be kind and respectful. There are also no garbage bins to dispose of any waste.

## Length of Trail

It's a short 10 - 15 minute walk down to the first waterfall.







## Hamilton Marsh

Location: Coombs area

At 3 kms long and 1/2 km wide, Hamilton Marsh is the largest wetlands on Central Vancouver Island. The trail system within is approximately 2 kms in length.

The trails leading from the parking areas guide you through a beautiful privately owned forest all the way to the marsh. The paths are narrow and some have rickety old bridges (as seen in the image above). So do be careful as you walk.

As you meander around this natural habitat, keep on the look out for marsh birds, ducks and geese. A viewing platform at the marsh allows for closer observation of the inhabitants and great photo ops. This area is particularly active in the Spring and Fall. Make sure to bring binoculars!

### Getting There

Hamilton Marsh is located approximately 4 km north of Coombs on South Hilliers Road, just off the Alberni Highway (Highway 4) on the way to Port Alberni. There are two entrances to the marsh on South Hilliers Road.

The first one is just after you turn off of the Alberni Highway. The second is a bit further down South Hilliers Road. Watch for large rocks on your left-hand side indicating the parking area(s). The second entrance has the quickest and easiest access to the marsh, as well as the most available parking space. Once on the trail stay for a more direct route.

[Google Map Link to Hamilton Marsh.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

As you can see from the image above, there are a few rickety old bridges that one must cross over. As well, the trails are quite narrow making this trail not the most ideal for wheelchairs or strollers.

### Dog Friendly?

This is a sensitive area for birds and other wildlife. Dogs should most definitely stay on a leash! They should also not be allowed to wade or swim in the marsh.





## Hole in the Wall

Location: Port Alberni area



Just off the highway before you enter the town of Port Alberni, there is a historic landmark one should see. Prior to the 1967 amalgamation of Port Alberni, this area served as a shortcut for the water supply to the town. The hole was blasted through a massive wall of volcanic shale and served as the town's water reservoir. Today there isn't much left to indicate that this landmark served any purpose, but it does leave us with a truly unique structure to marvel at.

If you continue along Roger Creek, you will also come to an area of man-made stone creations, otherwise known as inuksuit. And for those who just can't get enough of waterfalls, there is a real beauty in the same area. Follow the trail back up the hill (the way you came), but instead of turning right to go back to your vehicle, turn left and follow the trail until you hear more rushing water (about another 15 minute walk). There you will find a roped trail that leads you down to a shoreline where you will be able to view the stunning Sherwood Falls.

The trail leading up to the falls is on private land, so please respect the area!

### Getting There

The entrance to the trail for the Hole in the Wall is unmarked, but it is across the highway from Coombs Country Candy. If there is room you can park in the small pullout on the main highway, and the trail head will be immediately to your right. Otherwise, you can park in the gravel parking lot beside Coombs Country Candy and walk across the highway to the start of the trail (please be careful when crossing the highway!). Once you get down the first short incline (from the highway) there is a small sign that indicates "Hole in the Wall". Continue to follow the signs to find your way.

There is an alternate access point to the Hole in the Wall trail off of Sherwood Road.

[Google Map Link to Hole in the Wall.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The Hole in the Wall trail is **not** stroller or wheel-chair friendly. It has a fairly steep terrain with many small creek beds you must maneuver around.

### Dog Friendly?

We didn't notice any signs about keeping your dog on a leash, so I will leave that discretion up to you. However, it is good to note that there are no garbage bins to dispose of any waste.

### Length of Trail

It takes approximately 15 minutes to get to the Hole in the Wall. The trail continues on for those who wish to go further (as mentioned above).





## Rosewall Creek Falls

Location: Bowser area



There are two separate waterfalls to view, both within the same area. The lower one is the easiest to take a picture of (has the best vantage point). The larger falls is a bit further up the trail, which becomes quite steep and isn't as well maintained as the other portions of the trail.

I would assume that during the summer months when the water levels are lower you might be able to ramble along the large rocks in the clear pools at the bottom of the upper falls to get a better vantage point (instead of trying to scramble up the trail to it). But if you do decide to do this, please know you are doing so at your own risk. These same pools would make amazing swimming holes as well.

The trail is within a second-growth forest of Hemlock, Douglas Fir, Grand Fir, Western Red Cedar, and Sitka Spruce. There are also plenty of Alder and Big Leaf Maple trees too (I can only imagine how beautiful this place must look in the Fall!). The forest is also rich with lichen, moss, fungus and mushrooms creating a beautiful woodland scene.

### Getting There

Access to the falls is through Rosewall Creek Provincial Park, which is situated between Bowser and Fanny Bay.

Take the Cook Creek interchange off of Highway 19

- Follow Cook Creek Rd down to Hwy 19A and turn left (onto the highway)
- Turn right off of Hwy 19A onto Berray Road
- The entrance sign for the Provincial Park will be on your left-hand side just as you turn onto Berray Road

Alternatively, and for a more scenic drive, you can take Hwy 19A all the way from Parksville. This meandering highway will lead you through French Creek, Qualicum Beach, Qualicum Bay and Bowser before you reach Berray Road.

[Google Map Link to Rosewall Creek Provincial Park.](#)

## Trail Directions

From the parking area at the Provincial Park, take the trail that leads you upstream (left at the memorial sign). Within a few minutes, you will be winding your way around and under both of the highway bridges (Hwy 19 and 19A).

From there you will leave the highway noise behind and continue to follow the creek upstream.

## Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

Although this rustic trail is relatively flat, with only a few short inclines (until the very end), there are a lot of obstacles to pass over. These obstacles include things such as, large stumps and logs to manoeuvre around or duck under, and creeks to cross over on man-made log bridges. So, unfortunately, this trail isn't wheelchair or stroller friendly.

## Dog Friendly?

The trail starts at the Provincial Park, where all dogs must be on a leash at all time. However, in order to get to the Falls you will walk beyond the park boundaries. So I will leave the discretion up to you on whether or not you wish to keep your dog on a leash after that point. I will say, however, that the park does not offer any waste bags, and I don't recall seeing any garbage cans near the entrance.

## Length of Trail

This is a long one! The trail to the falls is approximately 4 km, making the entire trip there and back 8 km. At around the 2.5 km mark, you will leave the Provincial Park boundaries and continue on.



## Nile Creek

Location: Bowser area



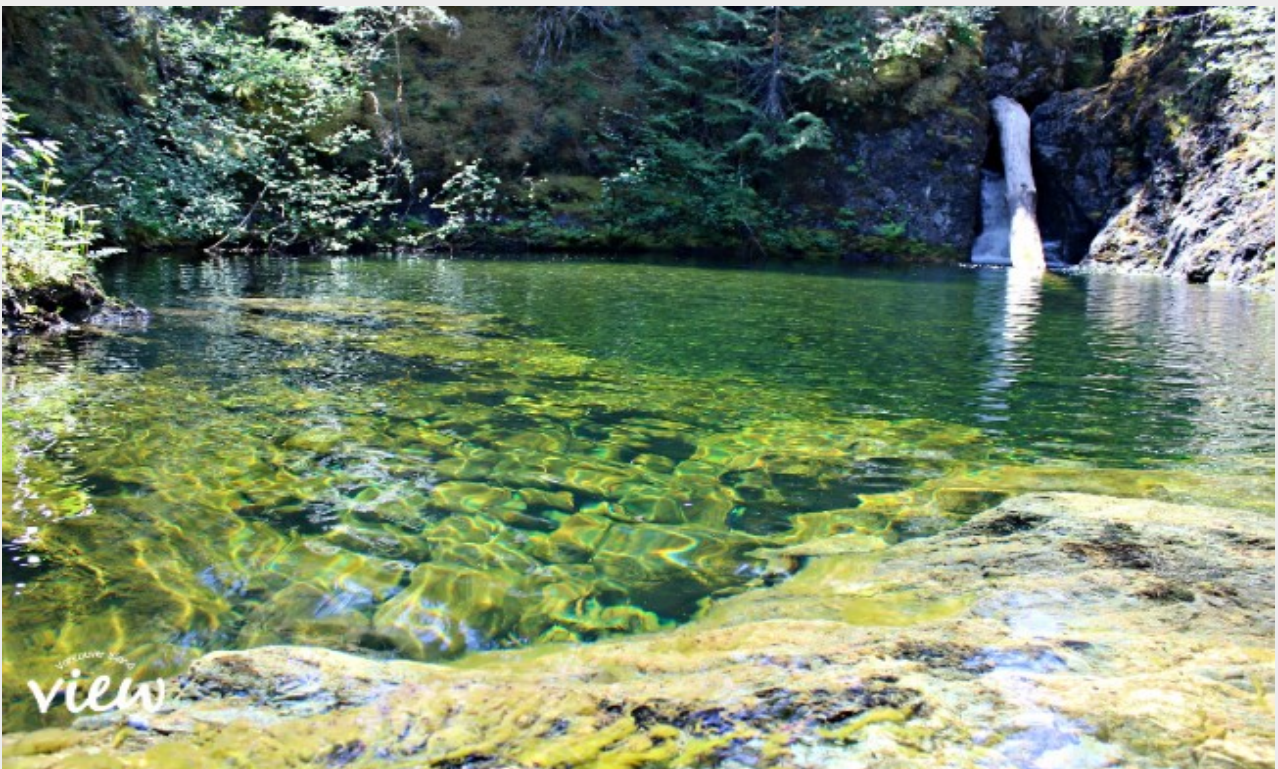
## Hidden Gems of Vancouver Island - Nile Creek

This trail follows alongside Nile Creek the entire way, and you will walk through a beautiful forest with a great variety of trees.

A lot of work has been put into trail maintenance, but it's still a challenge. The trail is often very muddy, has some single log bridges and some short steep sections. Hardy shoes, hiking poles, water and snacks are recommended.

At around the 45-minute mark, you will be greeted by waterfall after waterfall (and beautiful pools) to reward you until the end. In fact, there is a **total of 10 – 12 waterfalls** to view along the way! (I've heard there are 12, but we only found 10 of them).

In order to find all of the waterfalls, you need to follow every trail that leads off the main track. If you listen while you walk, you can hear the falls, but you won't necessarily see them. So use your senses and follow your ears. And keep watch for the alternate trails that keep veering off to your left.



### Getting There

Head northbound towards Courtenay. After you pass the Horne Lake Exit, you will cross over two bridges (overpasses of sorts). The next one should be Nile Creek bridge. Park on the north end of the bridge (there's a bit of a wide spot) and find the trail head on your right-hand side. Follow it back around and under the overpass. Continue on the trail until you reach the first waterfall (approximately 45 minutes).

If you are heading southbound, park on the north side of the bridge and follow a partially overgrown gated access road until it meets up with the main trail.

[Google Map Link to Approximate location of Nile Creek Trail.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

Due to the extremely muddy sections and the log bridges, unfortunately this trail is not wheelchair or stroller friendly.

### Dog Friendly?

As long as you don't mind your dog getting really muddy, then yes, I would say this is a dog-friendly trail. There are, however, no garbage cans to deposit waste bags.

### Length of Trail

The trail is approximately 5 km long, and takes 3 - 4 hours return.





## Wacky Woods

Location: Fanny Bay



This four acres of woodland in the heart of Fanny Bay is a sight to behold. Scattered throughout this privately owned land are hundreds of pieces of art created by the renowned Vancouver Island artists George Sawchuck (now deceased). The forest is open to anyone who wishes to enter this magical, unique world of Sawchuk's somewhat political observations of life represented through art. This treasure-trove is a place you can spend hours wandering around. Your brain will become tired from trying to interpret the message being conveyed at each stop, but your curiosity will be at its peak as you meander throughout this unique outdoor gallery.

### Getting There

There is no official address for the Wacky Woods. It does, however, have two access points. Both can be found using the reference point of the Fanny Bay Community Centre (7793 Island Hwy S, Fanny Bay).

#### Access Point #1

When you see the Fanny Bay Community Centre, turn onto Ships Point Road. From there, turn left onto Little Way, and then left again on Bates Drive. Follow Bates Drive until the very end. There will be an unmarked trailhead on your right-hand side. This access point gives you the closest entry into the Wacky Woods. A few steps into the trail and you will officially be in the heart of the magic.

[Google Map Link to Access Point #1.](#)

#### Access Point #2

Head north on Highway 19A (past the Fanny Bay Community Hall) and look for Jacob Road. Just past Jacob road you will see a yellow gate across a trail on the east side of the highway. This trail leads along the Fanny Bay waterfront. Keep following the trail to your right to access the Wacky Woods. If you can't find parking near the yellow gate, then you will have to park on the other side of the highway and walk across.

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

The trails around the woods are flat and easy to walk, but there are a few areas which are a bit overgrown, and require you to push the brush and/or tree branches aside to continue on. But yes, I would say this area is stroller and wheelchair accessible (from the first access point anyway).

### Dog Friendly?

It is private land, so please be mindful of your pet. I would advise a leash, and make sure to clean up after it.

### Length of Trail

It is not a long walk as far as area is concerned, but as mentioned above, you could quite possibly spend hours discovering, examining, and exploring the woods.





## Cumberland Potholes

Location: Cumberland



Otherwise known as Perseverance Potholes (because they are located on Perseverance Creek), the Cumberland Potholes offer explorers a dramatic landscape and topography. The area is quite simply magical...especially so for budding photographers!

While you are there make sure to take notice of the smoothness of the rocks, the pools carved out by the flowing water, the unique shapes, the deep colours, and the dark and intriguing crevices. And let's not forget, the peaceful beauty of your surroundings.

This hidden gem, tucked into the forests surrounding Cumberland, should not be missed!

### Getting There

- From the Inland Island Highway (Hwy 19), take the Cumberland exit, and start heading towards Comox Lake.
- At the corner of Royston Road and Sutton Road, there will be a large gravel parking lot (parking for the Cumberland Recreation Centre). You can park here and walk the few hundred metres or so to the trailhead; OR, park just after the 90° corner (where Sutton Road becomes Comox Road) on the side of the road (bringing you closest to the trailhead).
- Walk through the yellow gate and enter a large system of biking and hiking trails.
- At the sign, turn right and head up the hill.
- You will pass through a forested area, as well as a clear-cut area (approximately 1 km from the sign at the bottom).
- When you get back into another forested area (after the clear-cut), stay right (there will be quite a few trails veering off to your left).
- When you get to the bridge, take the trail on either side and head downstream a bit.
- You have arrived!

[Google Map Link to approximate location of Cumberland Potholes.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Accessible?

While the majority of the trail is uphill, the fact that it is a well-maintained very wide path makes it stroller friendly. However please note, walking around the Cumberland Potholes definitely requires sure footing. The rocks are very slippery, and there are a few really deep pools. Please watch your children at all times.

### Dog Friendly?

The trail leading up to the Cumberland Potholes is definitely dog-friendly. There is a sign at the trailhead which states dogs must be on a leash, but many people ignored this rule. However as mentioned above, once at the Potholes the area is extremely slippery. And if you are continuing downstream, it requires a lot of scampering and jumping across rocks, some of which are quite steep.

### Length of Trail

The hike to the Cumberland Potholes is approximately 2 km (one way). There are many more hiking and/or biking trails surrounding the area if you wish to continue on.



## Trent River Falls

Location: Royston area



This is a very short trail (approximately 10 minutes to the falls), but well worth it if you are already in the area.

The narrow trail follows a bit of a ridge, and isn't very well maintained. However, someone was kind enough to mark the trail with orange flag tape, so if in doubt, follow the tape until you reach the waterfall.

The descent down to the river is extremely steep, but doable with caution and sturdy footwear. There are ropes to hang onto, if you need them. The bottom section of the roped area is not recommended for young children. This steep section of the trail is extremely slippery when wet, so please use extra caution.

If you prefer not to descend down to the river bed, you can still get a great view of the waterfall. About 1/4 of the way down the roped section (the easiest part), hang a right on the trodden path. You will discover a great vantage point that is perfect for taking pictures of the Falls.

### Getting There

- You will be looking for the Trent River Bridge, which is located on the Inland Island Highway, on your way to or from Courtenay.
- This trail requires you to park your vehicle on the highway.

If you are heading northbound, park on the north side of the highway right after the bridge. Approximately 40 meters up you will see a wider rough road (trail) that leads into a forested area.

If you are heading southbound, there will be a large gravel pull-out area off the highway on the north side of the Trent River bridge. You will follow the path that leads under the overpass. From there, follow the orange flag tape.

[Google Map Link to approximate location of Trent River Falls.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

At the beginning of the trail you are walking along a very narrow ridge, and after that it becomes extremely steep. So, unfortunately, this trail is not wheelchair or stroller friendly.

### Dog Friendly?

Due to the same reasons mentioned above, I would have to say this isn't a dog-friendly trail.

### Length of Trail

The trail is approximately 10 - 15 minutes long.





## Medicine Bowls

Location: Courtenay area



The Medicine Bowls consist of three main pools which are part of the Browns River. Although the area is sometimes frequented by those looking for secluded places to swim, swimming in these pools is not advised. At the start of the trailhead, there is a river stone memorial plaque commemorating two tragic deaths that occurred in the area. The plaque also reads: “These Waters Can Rise Quickly And Unexpectedly; Beware Of Dangerous Undercurrents.”

And not only can the water conditions be lethal here, but the rocks and paths that intersect the area around the Medicine Bowls are unmarked, slippery, and very steep. So please be careful when visiting!



### Getting There

Getting to the start of the trailhead can be quite tricky.

It's located off of Forbidden Plateau Road on a dirt track called Medicine Bowl Road.

To get to Forbidden Plateau Road, take the Piercy Road connector (exit 127) north of Courtenay, from the Inland Island Highway. Turn onto Forbidden Plateau Road.

Just before Forbidden Plateau Road makes a sharp left up the hill, you will notice a dirt road straight ahead. This is the one you need to take (it should be labelled Medicine Bowl Road). Once you are on Medicine Bowl Road, it's still a good 1.5 km's to the trailhead, and the road is less than ideal for most vehicles. There are extremely large potholes, and the "road" (if you can even call it that) becomes very narrow.

If you don't think your vehicle (or you!) can handle this type of terrain, there are two parking spot options for you.

You can park your vehicle on the wide spot located on Forbidden Plateau Road (just before the entrance to Medicine Bowl Road), and walk the 1.5 km's to the trailhead.

OR:

You can come part way with your vehicle, as the first portion of the dirt road isn't as bad as the last. About half-way down the road, there is a large cleared area that would be a good place to park if you don't wish to travel any further. It's really not that far from this spot to the trailhead.

If you prevail and drive all the way through, you will come to a very large area, much like a cul-de-sac (but with no houses). Park near the memorial plaque (mentioned above) and you will see the trail that leads down to the Medicine Bowls.

[Google Map Link to Medicine Bowl Road.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

While the majority of the trek to this waterfall is driving, the trail that leads down to the Falls is quite steep. And once you are at the Medicine Bowls, you are walking on slick rocks. So I would not recommend a wheelchair or stroller on this particular trail.

### Dog Friendly?

Due to the slippery rocks that surround the waterfall and pools, as well as the rapid flowing water, I would not recommend bringing a dog on this trail.

### Length of Trail

If you are able and willing to bring your vehicle to the last available spot, then the trail leading down to the Medicine Bowls and falls is quite short (less than 10 minutes). If you aren't able to drive the entire way, then you are looking at approximately 1 - 2 km to the same point.





## Nymph Falls

Location: Courtenay area

While the Waterfall is by no means hidden, the park surrounding the falls is a bit off the beaten track. It's also located on the way to the Medicine Bowls, and totally worth the stop!

The waterfall is part of the Puntledge River, which is a popular spot year round for all kinds of activities. From Fall through to Spring the waters rage through this area, much to the delight of white water enthusiasts. The Summer months bring calmer glacial waters and a great place to swim.

The Puntledge River is a hydroelectric spillway, which means that the levels are manually regulated. So if you hear a siren going off, the water level is rising, and you must evacuate immediately!

The park surrounding the falls has designated trails for pedestrians, mountain bikers, and horses. And you might be happy to know that it's a leash-optional area for your dog!

### Getting There

Nymph Falls is located on Forbidden Plateau Road. Take the Piercy Road connector (exit 127) north of Courtenay, from the Inland Island Highway. Turn onto Forbidden Plateau Road, and follow the Nymph Falls Park signs to the parking area. The park entrance is located just before the hatchery.

[Google Map Link to Nymph Falls.](#)

### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

This trail is very well-maintained and a nice leisurely 600-meter stroll to the Falls.

### Dog Friendly?

The entire trail is leash optional!



**Bonus!**

**Little Huson Caves**

**Location: Woss area**



If you are looking for a great adventure head to Little Huson Caves. They are located just outside of Woss (which, in itself, is approximately 188 km's north of Courtenay). We realize that this is a long ways away from the Mid-Vancouver Island area, but we wanted to include it in this e-book as a bonus because it's the ultimate hidden gem!

The northern half of Vancouver Island is rich with natural caves and limestone features. In fact there are over 1000 known caves, with speculation of just as many waiting to be discovered. **Little Huson Caves**, located within the Regional District of Mount Waddington, offers us a small, yet spectacular, taste of the karst topography found on the island.

The great thing about Little Huson Caves is it offers caving opportunities without having to go underground, unless you want to. This regional park contains 15 known caves.

The park is centred around Atluck Creek Canyon, which is an area of breathtaking natural beauty. There are a number of amazing karst features to view and explore.

### The Main Highlights

The **Vanishing River Cave** has a large cathedral entrance that welcomes exploration. Inside this cave the creek flows underground for 60 meters. It is thought that the Atluck Creek Canyon itself was formed by a down-cutting surface stream which then, as now, flowed underground only briefly. What's left today is amazing topography, surrounded by deep pools which are filled with crystal-clear green water.

The park has a number of other minor karst features that might be of interest to visitors with a discerning eye.

- There are 'Grykes', which are shallow cracks in the ground
- 'Scallops', which are rippled rock surfaces created by high pressure water flow
- And as well, there are many shadowy openings that urge you to click on your flashlight and peer inside (or explore further, if you are willing).

### Things to Note about the Area

- ~ Visitors take a self-guided tour using interpretive signs erected at strategic sites.
- ~ As no special equipment is necessary to view the area (unless you are there to explore underground), the site is good for the inexperienced caver.
- ~ The trails developed throughout the park are rudimentary at best.
- ~ There are a few signs warning visitors that the area has inherent dangers, but it is largely up to you to use common sense when exploring.
- ~ The rocks are extremely slippery when wet, so use extra caution when climbing.
- ~ A few of the pools are quite deep, so keep children close by at all times.
- ~ There are pit toilets at the trail head.
- ~ There is no cell coverage in the area.

### Getting There

The route is a little convoluted, so take notice of where you are going and pay close attention to the signs (they are there to guide you to Little Huson Caves Regional Park. It is good to note that the very first sign says, “Huston Caves” (with a 'T'), but it is the correct one!

The road surface deteriorates in spots, and also becomes quite narrow in certain areas. We were able to get down the road with our motorhome. However, there were a few spots where we wondered how we were going to ‘pull-over’ should we happen upon a vehicle coming in the opposite direction.

While the road doesn’t require 4 wheel drive, good tires (and lots of gas) are in order. It is definitely recommended that you drive slowly to avoid a flat tire.

From the Island Highway (Hwy 19), take the Zeballos turn-off just north of Woss onto a gravel logging road. Keep close watch and follow the signs directing you down a series of gravel roads (for approximately 9 kilometres) to Little Huson Caves Regional Park.

Just remember, there is absolutely no cell coverage in the area, so extra precautions are necessary!



### Wheelchair / Stroller Friendly?

The trail has rickety stairs, and as mentioned above, is rudimentary at best, which, ultimately makes it somewhat challenging at times. So, unfortunately, this trail would not be suitable for wheelchairs and/or strollers.

### Dog Friendly?

You are literally out in the middle of nowhere, and it is not a busy area. However, as mentioned above, the area is full of open caves, has steep, rickety stairs, and slippery rocks. We opted to leave our dog at home. I will leave that decision up to you!

### Length of Trail

The entire park is 4.9 hectares. The trail to the Vanishing River Cave is short, and takes approximately 15 minutes.

Vancouver Island is a big, beautiful place with boundless options for exploring. The 23 hidden gems you just read about are by no means an exhaustive list of what is available to you. In fact, this e-book covers only a small portion of the hidden gems found on Vancouver Island. However, I will say that the ones mentioned are most definitely some of our favourites. And we hope they become your favourites too.

We are truly blessed to be able to have access to such tranquil areas. While you are exploring, pay attention to the way the air smells (does it smell like ocean mist or scented woodland?), and the sounds you hear (do you hear seals barking in the distance, birds chirping, leaves rustling, water trickling?). Enjoy not only the final destination, but the journey getting there. Let this e-book serve as an entry point to a world of outdoor wonder.

Now, go out and explore!