

# BEST DAMN WEEKEND EVER

## HIKE BRITISH COLUMBIA'S NORTH COAST TRAIL

### TIME2GO

LEAF-PEEPING

IF BACKPACKING WERE A VIDEO GAME, you'd need a cheat code to get to a level this exciting. You'll sash through miles of marshland and tromp across rocky beaches and tidal zones teeming with sea life. Then you'll cross swollen rivers on shoulder-straining cable cars and "boonie-bash" (localese for bushwhack) through miles of undergrowth. This new 36-mile trek in Cape Scott Provincial Park hugs Vancouver Island's rugged northern shore and seems engineered to test your mettle and delight your senses. The epic (and fun as hell) gauntlet of challenges also rewards you with some of the island's finest beach camping.

For years, up-island hiking paled in comparison to the West Coast Trail, that famous 45-mile stretch of boardwalk in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. Now, however, after 2 years of development, Cape Scott has its own fledgling backcountry prize: a 4-day trek through wildlife-packed coastal boreal forests with camping on pocket beaches, each more beautiful than the last. The trail officially opens this month, even though some sections are a tad behind schedule. Fortunately, instead of delaying the entire route, BC park officials have simply issued warnings to watch your ass through the diosy sections. God love the Canadians.

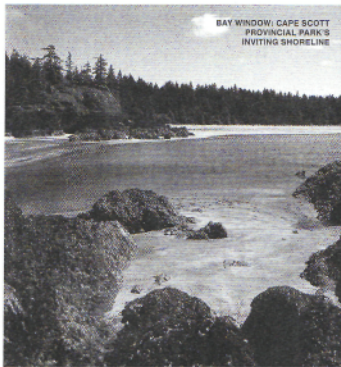
From the San Josef trailhead, go north on an old road that parallels St. Mary's Creek. Four miles in, the trail passes a cluster of old homesteads littered with pioneer relics: rusted wheels, saws, a bed frame. Follow the trail 5 more miles to camp in Nissen Blight, a sandy bay where spectacular sea stars and anemones lurk in nearby tidal pools. In the morning, strap on gaiters and muck through 4 unmarked miles of the Nahwit's Lowland Bog until you reach the beach again at Laura Creek.



**The Way** Turn west onto Holberg Road 3 miles south of Port Hardy on BC 19A, drive 30 miles, following signs to the Cape Scott Trail. Theft has been a problem, so don't leave valuables in a vehicle. Permits None required.

**Shuttle** Arrange a pickup at Skinner Creek through the water taxi service in Port Hardy ([porthardywatertaxi.net](http://porthardywatertaxi.net)).

**Map and Guide** [northernvancouverislandtrailsociety.com](http://northernvancouverislandtrailsociety.com)



**BAY WINDOW: CAPE SCOTT PROVINCIAL PARK'S INVITING SHORELINE**

This is no Jimmy Buffett beach; the canted shoreline is chock-full of rocks that knock like cue balls with every step of this 7-mile stretch. Thankfully, a mile-long boardwalk cuts overland to the Stranby River, where the first of two cable-car crossings puts your pees to the test. Two hikers and their gear can fit onto a platform that hangs by pulleys from a cable. Let go, and gravity takes you to mid-river; from there, you pull yourself to the other side. The payoff: camping at peaceful Shuttleworth Blight, where playful black bears may stop in at Irony Creek for a drink.

After breakfast on day 3, set off for 4 miles of boonie-bashing as you continue northeast. Solid compass skills are critical; the vine-like salal is sanity-testing thick. The open ground of second-growth forest is a welcome sight as you tromp a mile across Cape Sully to another beachfront campsite, where you'll harvest mussels from the shoreline and steam them over an open fire.

Plan your final day around low tide, so you can scamper over boulders in the tidal zone and avoid some bushwhacking. Before the last cape, ascend into the forest and head east until you drop to the mouth of the Nahwit River. Follow the shoreline south around a small lagoon, then take an abandoned road to another cable car across the swift, sly Nahwit. From the eastern shore, it's a quick mile back to the ocean, and 2 more miles along the beach to Skinner Creek, where your water taxi awaits.

Matt Wilens

### 2 days

**GLASTENBURY MTN. LOOP, VT**  
From the AT/Long Trail parking lot 5 miles east of Bennington, trek 10 miles to Glastenbury's summit for panoramas of the Green, Taconic, and Berkshire Ranges, whose oak, birch and ash trees are bedecked in amber and fiery reds. Camp at Goddard Shelter and return on the West Ridge and Bald Mountain Trails. Peaks mid- to late September. (802) 747-6705

### 2 days

**APPALACHIAN TRAIL, NC**  
Across the AT in Wesser near the Nantahala Outdoor Center and hoof it 11.5 miles south, ridgewalking above narrow valleys, past a tiny cabin to the Cold Spring Shelter. En route, ascend Wesser Bald (4,627 feet) and climb the old tower to view the firestorm of colors atop the peaks. Maples mingle with tupelo and sweet gum trees, whose star-shaped leaves glow canary yellow. Peaks in October. [mccorreae.com/hike](http://mccorreae.com/hike)

### 3 days

**ENCHANTMENT LAKES, WA**  
Come late September, the Cascades are no longer dominated by evergreens; instead, brilliant-yellow mountain ash and alpine larch punctuate the hillsides and glacial basins with color. On the east edge of Loavesworth, access the Snow Lakes Trail for an 18-mile point-to-point hike with 5,740 feet of elevation gain to Shart Lake trailhead. (509) 548-6977