



FOOTPRINTS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND TRAIL

www.vi-trail.ca

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Nature Conservancy Day – Oak Bay



As part of TELUS’s 17th Annual Days of Giving, TELUS and the Vancouver Island Trail Association (VITA) partnered in organizing a Nature Conservancy Day at Oak Bays’ Anderson Hill Park May 29th. Among the Team were Liz Bicknell, President of VITA and Kathy Baan, TELUS’s Senior Manager Community Investment. The Event marks the first stage of a broader program of cooperation being explored between VITA and TELUS aimed at promoting nature conservation and community development along the 800 km Trail from Victoria to Cape Scott.

Vancouver Island Trail Forges Path at The Breakwater District at Ogden Point

Vancouver Island Trail Association is a volunteer-created 800 km trail that connects Victoria in the south to Cape Scott at the northern tip of Vancouver Island. We are excited to announce that the Breakwater District at Ogden Point is now included in the starting portion of the trail! A series of signs will guide users throughout the pedestrian areas of the property.

Liz Bicknell, VITA’s President, meets with with Brian Cant, Director, Communications & Engagement with the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority to officially ‘open’ this part of the trail.



Terry's "Zones and Subzones"

THE HYPER MARITIME SUBZONE OF THE COASTAL WESTERN HEMLOCK ZONE Part 5 of a Series

As mentioned in Parts 1-4, the Coastal Western Hemlock Zone (CWH) is by far the most extensive vegetation zone on Vancouver Island and is divided into multiple subzones and variants. In this article, let's get a sense of the hyper maritime subzone of CWH. So, why the 'hyper maritime' moniker? As with a 'hyperactive' youngster, the use of 'hyper' implies extra or elevated. Indeed, this subzone of CWH is so close to the ocean that its climate is essentially that of the adjacent open ocean – there is virtually no 'continental' effect related to the greater heating and cooling of a land surface. Hence - mild temperatures, little frost or snow, lots of cloud cover and fog, high humidity and rain distributed throughout the year, including in summer.

Soils are invariably moist to wet (no drought period); in fact, poor drainage is the norm even on average sites of moderate hillslopes. When you walk through these forests, your boots sink into the soft, mucky forest floor usually accompanied by a squishing sound!



Typical cloudy rainy day in the hyper maritime. Because of this extra-wet climate, bog wetlands and bog woodlands are often as extensive as closed cedar-dominated forest.

The most extensive, typical forest of average or zonal sites is dominated by cedars, mostly red cedar but often accompanied by yellow cedar (aka cypress), along with lesser components of western hemlock, shore pine and even mountain hemlock. So, you might ask, "why are the usual subalpine species – yellow cedar and mountain hemlock – growing right down to sea level"?

This is most likely a consequence of the prevailing wet soils – as any gardener will tell you, "Wet soils are cold soils" and the hyper maritime soil temperature regime at low elevations is similar to that of the subalpine. Consequently, these forests tend to have only moderate to low productivity because of the resulting growing conditions.

Perhaps surprisingly for a CWH subzone, western hemlock is not the dominant species that it is in the wet subzone. In most forests, including in the often-extensive swamp forest types (actually more woodland than forest), hemlock is subordinate to the cedars. When this type of forest was first surveyed and studied almost 50 years ago, I and a couple of other ecologists suggested this forest type should be recognized as a separate zone rather than as just another subzone of CWH (we lost that argument). Productive high forest dominated by western hemlock that is so common in the wet subzone (see Part 4) is limited in the hyper maritime to special sites that are particularly well drained so as to get rid of the excess moisture that the climate delivers. This includes the soils on steep slopes (colluvial slopes); soils derived from the sands and gravels of glacial meltwater deposits, fluvial and raised beach deposits, or soils over particularly permeable bedrock like limestone and even the ash and cinders of recently active volcanic cinder cones (a rare situation [Kitasoo Hill]).

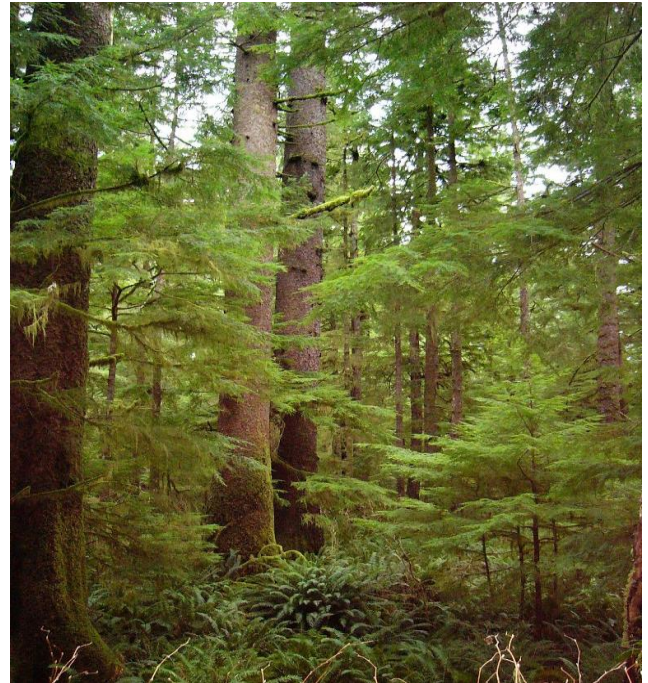


Terry in a typical scrubby, cedar-dominated forest of an 'average' hyper maritime site.

Because of the shorter tree heights and relatively open crowns of the cedars on all but the rather exceptional hemlock dominated sites, neither windfall nor wildfire are important as agents of disturbance and stand renewal. Consequently, most hyper maritime forest are much older than what elsewhere is considered 'old-growth' (i.e. >250 years). Indeed, these are truly ancient forests that have been around, and little changed for 1,000 years or perhaps even for several millennia.

The species mix on average or wetter sites of moderate to subdued topography is more diverse than just about anywhere else in the CWH. The swampy woodlands are particularly diverse. This arises because of micro-site variability – the intricate mix of somewhat better drained organic hummocks interspersed with intervening wetter depressions supporting the different species that such diverse growing conditions favor. On Vancouver Island, the cedar-dominated forests typically have a dense, almost impenetrable cover of salal, which strongly contrasts with the hyper maritime of the central and north mainland coast. Why salal cover drops so dramatically to the north remains a puzzle – is it a climatic effect, or perhaps the influence of deer (browsing) because of the much higher deer populations (although smaller in stature) on the mainland?

Truly rich, more fertile sites are few and far between in the hyper maritime likely because it is hard to overcome/compensate for the prevailing cool, wet soils. The most notable exception is the fertile, highly productive, tall Sitka spruce forest of alluvial sites along larger rivers that can be seen flanking the VI Trail when you cross the Shushartie, Nahwitti and Stranby Rivers. These alluvial sites will have the lush sword fern and salmonberry seen elsewhere in the CWH, along with variable lesser cover of foamflowers, other ferns and members of the lily family. Sitka spruce forest is also seen on the well-drained, sandy soils of former beach deposits immediately behind the beautiful present-day beaches along the North Coast Trail section. These tend to have a moss-dominated ground cover with fewer shrubs and herbs.



Exceptional Sitka spruce grows on the rich fluvial/alluvial sites of the hyper maritime

A final, I think intriguing question: Did the peatlands of Ireland and the moors of Scotland have forests something like this before the advent of Man and his grazing animals?

T. Lewis – August 2022



Recent Island Trail improvement project

The VITA bridge builders, a crew under the direction of Terry Lewis, VITA's Director of Operations, were at it recently bridging an unnamed creek between Francis Lake and Nadira Rd., southeast of Port Alberni. This bridge now makes for a safe crossing where hikers previously had to rely on their balancing skills crossing on a log or wade the creek. It was a risky crossing especially during higher seasonal water flow levels.

nyone



And the Building Begins.....

The volunteer crew built the bridge - a simple structure from redcedar poles and split cedar decking from an old log - this after the appropriate notification process for clear-span bridges, and within the Fisheries window (unlikely any fish there, but we treated the stream as if there were fish).



Split Cedar Decking From Old Log

Bridge building crew members were Terry Lewis, David Webb, Steve & Joan Sterling, Paul & Wendy Friberg, and Clark Cameron.



Project Completed!!

For Anyone Interested – A Big Thank You to Carly Wiechnik For Her Article in “The Trek” on the VITRAIL – Section By Section!

[The Vancouver Island Trail: A Whirlwind Tour - The Trek](#)

We Close With a Sighting of Comox Lake From a Stop Near the Village of Cumberland



VITA'S Vision For a Homegrown Adventure:

A signature recreation destination in Canada, the Vancouver Island Trail will span approximately 800 km from Victoria to Cape Scott. Traversing both ancient and working forests, and wild coasts, while joining island communities, the Trail in its entirety will be a 2-3 month-long journey. Not just for long distance hikers, day hikers will enjoy many access points. By 2023, Vancouver Island will have a unique recreational opportunity and a showcase for its communities, including highlighting First Nation's Art, Culture, Language, and History.

We hope you will visit our [website](#)

Interested in our [map](#) of the VI Trail and links to the various sections?

*Once again, your feedback and offered input is encouraged and valued –
Please feel free to contact the Editor, Scott Henley, at:
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Want to Get Involved?

There are two main ways to help VITA complete the VI Trail:

If you wish to become a [Volunteer](#)

*If you don't have any spare time, become a "Friend of the VI Trail"
And help us Out with a tax deductible [Donation](#)*

As Well – Follow Our VITA Volunteers on [Facebook](#)

And – Follow us on [Instagram](#)

