



# Time for Nature



## Controlling traffic on the West Coast Trail Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada

The West Coast Trail is world-renowned for its scenery and its physical challenges. Every year, thousands of hikers brave its rocky climbs, blasting winds and pouring rain to experience the spectacular beauty of Vancouver Island's western edge.



The West Coast Trail is renowned for its scenery.  
© Parks Canada, W. Lynch, 1985.

The trail is one of the best-known features of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada. But its well-deserved popularity makes it a management challenge. On one hand, Parks Canada wants to encourage hikers to experience this ancient coastal rainforest. But to properly care for the trail and retain the park's ecological integrity, visitor use must be controlled.

### How many hikers is too many?

After Pacific Rim National Park Reserve was established in 1970, the West Coast Trail became increasingly popular. In the early 1990s, about 10,000 hikers tackled the trail during the May to September peak season. For Parks Canada – and the health of the trail - this was clearly too many people. The soil was eroding and tree roots were exposed. The trail was becoming wider as people skirted wet areas, and trailside vegetation was being trampled.



Parks Canada has improved the trail with boardwalks and bridges.  
© Parks Canada, W. Lynch, 1985.

### A delicate balance

Something had to be done to protect the park environment. As well, Parks Canada wanted to ensure that visitors enjoyed the hiking experience. Hikers should not feel crowded on the trail.

Parks Canada established a user fee and limited hiker numbers to 8,000 hikers per season. Up to 52 hikers per day would be allowed to enter the trail. To protect wetlands and streams, Parks Canada installed boardwalks and bridges. In steep sections, they erected ladders.

### The new measures worked, almost too well



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Hiker numbers decreased almost immediately. In recent years, there have been as few as 4,800 hikers in the peak season.

The reasons for the decline are uncertain. Potential visitors may have been confused about the difficulty of getting trail reservations. According to Parks Canada's Louanne Ralston, "the myth started circulating that 'you can't get on the trail for two years'. We realized that we had to go back to marketing the trail."

### Visitors welcome!

The trek is certainly difficult and physically demanding. Accidents and injury are a risk, and hikers must be prepared for wet, cold and foggy conditions. But it's worth it!

The ancient coastal rainforest is dominated by spruce, hemlock and cedar. You'll hike among some of the tallest trees in Canada. And along the Pacific shore, you will encounter countless caves, creeks, coves, tidal pools and rocky headlands.



The Trail's attractions include coastal rainforests. © Parks Canada, A. Cornellier, 1988.

### An outstanding recreational experience

The trail and other **park attractions** are there for visitors' enjoyment and appreciation. If you wish to hike the West Coast Trail, contact Parks Canada. To avoid the crowds and be sure of a place on the trail, consider coming in the shoulder season. An unforgettable experience awaits you!

For more information visit [www.pc.gc.ca/pacificrim](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pacificrim)