

On Foot, with Paddle

Two guidebooks help you really get to know Vancouver Island

People from all over the world come to Vancouver Island to sample our world of wilderness, rugged coastline and tidy cities by the sea. Now, it's one thing for visitors and residents alike to see this island touring the towns and driving to motels or campsites, but there are two other ways to get properly acquainted with this place: on foot or by boat. On foot, you get a taste of the coastal rainforest up close, mountains and hills, beaches and parks; you might see a bald eagle feasting on spawning salmon running upstream or a bear roaming a hill (hopefully in the distance). And by boat, you get the sea—currents and rolling waves, fresh salty air, refreshing ocean breezes and a good look at the truly wild coast. Whales surface only metres away and harbour seals surround you, playing and splashing and sea lions lazily sun themselves on a nearby rock. But before you head out there, check out these books for a better idea of just what's involved.

Hiking Trails I: Victoria and Vicinity is a must for anyone setting out on foot in the Victoria area. Vancouver Island Trails Information Society has been publishing this one since the '70s, and it's been freshly updated for 2007. There are over 80 trails described in detail, including tidbits about wildlife in the area, place names and history. And these aren't all strenuous trails only \$200 boots with Vibram soles can take you on—there's a good range presented from city rambles like Playfair Park or the chip trail around Cedar Hill Golf Course to the muddy ups-and-downs of the Juan de Fuca Trail or some steep mountain scrambles. Even better, most of these trails are regularly well-maintained, so the information presented in the book will hold true for some time.

The book is well organized, with each section starting off with a nice map of the area, then highlighting some of its more attractive attributes. Difficulty and distance are provided next, so if you're scouting for a quick and easy hike or something to occupy a full day, you won't have to read far to find out. Easy-to-follow directions to trailheads and access points (including parking) precede the actual trail descriptions, which are

accurate and straightforward. Finally, there is a section of trivia and other nearby hikes that might appeal. All in all, this is a handy guidebook for hiking around Victoria.

As for the ocean, there is something special about multi-day kayaking trips. Carrying everything to sustain you in a few small dry-bags carefully stashed away around you offers a great sense of satisfaction. And the feeling of freedom! *Wild Coast 3: A Kayaking and Recreation Guide for B.C.'s South Coast and East Vancouver Island* author John Kimantas spent 78 days in a kayak in 2006, so he knows what it's all about. Plus, he's



Wild Coast 3
by John Kimantas
Whitecap Books
344 pages, \$29.95

a great writer, making the book both comprehensive and fun to read.

Kimantas provides a wealth of background information on just about anywhere you could possibly want to go on the south coast and Vancouver Island (although Kimantas has also written guides that go all the way up to Alaska). From a good description of first nations' history, including place names and pronunciation guides, to detailed information about currents and tides, this is a kayaker's essential manual. The maps included leave a little to be desired, but he does provide a reference for proper marine charts and for waterproof maps. There is a focus on multi-day trips, with details of potential campsites throughout.

One great feature of *Wild Coast 3* is each section's inclusion of "If you have a day" sections (followed by "If you have two days", and so on, up to "The ideal trip") making planning a breeze. There is something to be said for just going out and exploring for yourself but, as Kimantas warns, there are some places that are spectacular but very hard going in a kayak. And when there's somewhere just over the way that's equally spectacular but much easier to paddle, why take the hard route? Kimantas gives options, but he's gone out there and tried it all. The book is the benefit of his experience.

Whether you want to paddle in the sea or climb a mountain, there are few places as ideal as Vancouver Island to do it. B.C.'s natural beauty is staggering, but to get a real sense of what it's actually like, you've got to get out of the car and become a part of that landscape.

—Matt J. Simmons



Hiking Trails I: Victoria and Vicinity
compiled and edited by Richard K. Blier
Vancouver Island Trails Information Society,
176 pages, \$22.95