

West Coast Trail

Pacific Rim National Park  
British Columbia, Canada

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# Introduction

This is my personal diary of my trip on the West Coast Trail. If you wish to have more details on anything feel free to contact me. As English is not my first language I apologize for potential mistakes. If you want to help me improve my English, feel free to contact me. And if you just like my diary, feel free to contact me!

## **getting there ... (Aug 22, 2005)**

Our trip started in Burnaby, BC. We took off early but missed the 10 o'clock ferry from Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay anyhow. In Victoria we found out quickly that there is nothing much to see, except shops, shops and... stores. Unfortunately we didn't have enough time to go to the Royal British Columbia Museum. But we drove up to Beacon Hill to have a look across the Juan de Fuca Strait to the United States. After a burger at Wendy's and a sub at Subway we hit the road to Port Renfrew. My fully loaded car had a hard time with the bumpy road. Port Renfrew is not a place where I would like to live – there is simply nothing. Not knowing where to go we asked a guy at a fireplace if he could give us some advice. It turned out that he is renting out parking lots at the "Lighthouse Pub" (yes, there is a pub!). He showed us where the West Coast Trail Express bus stops (on the street in front of the Lighthouse Pub). We camped on the beach and Björn was very eager to light up a fire. This way we had a warm place in the fog which was coming in from the sea. The fog was so thick that you could feel the droplets. After a while everything was wet. What a warm welcome...

# The West Coast Trail

## **0<sup>th</sup> day – Port Renfrew to Bamfield (Aug 23, 2005)**

Our Bus (the West Coast Trail Express) was late and we were waiting on the street between the Port Renfrew Hotel and the Lighthouse Pub. The bus ride was bumpy and uncomfortable. The bus drives along forest roads to Bamfield, passing Lake Cowichan. The road was winding through many logged areas. It was easy to see the difference between old growth forest and cultivated forest. The cultivated forest looks very much like forests in Germany, tree beside tree densely packed and only very few plants on the ground.

The bus arrived at the Bamfield park entrance with a major delay after driving for almost 5 hours. At the park office in Pachena Bay we registered and took part in the mandatory information session. It is usually scheduled at 1.30 pm. If you have the ability to do this before your first day of hiking you should try to reach the park office in time. Since our WCT permit was valid from the next day on we were told that we are not supposed to take off before the next day's morning. For a while we were thinking of redefining "next day's morning" to "now" but then decided to be lazy. So we walked over to the Pachena Bay campground. I walked to the Indian Reserve together with Martin, but it appeared to us that there was nothing like a store (later we've seen campers coming with some plastic bags, so maybe there is a store nearby). I had a long nap on the beach and Björn went swimming. It was clear and sunny, but the air temperature was very low. It was freezing cold in the shadow! Unlike in the Stein Valley, where it was always warm, I only took my thin and lite sleeping bag with me. I was freezing this night and decided that I will have to wear warmer clothes in the night. At least we had a warm cedar wood fire on the beach before we went to bed. Burning up the cedar driftwood smells so good that we enjoyed sitting even in the smoke. We also noticed a slightly different flame colour. It seemed to be more yellowish which is possibly caused by the sodium ions of the salt water.

## **1<sup>st</sup> day – Darling Creek (Aug 24, 2005)**

We were on the trail early and along the first ten kilometers to Pachena Lighthouse the trail is wide and easy to hike. Just a few mud holes to hop over. We had a rest at the lighthouse and enjoyed the view. We've seen a huge white-tailed eagle just above us but Wolfi was too slow to take an in-flight photo. We also met some exceptionally

unfriendly people up there and it turned out that they were Germans. They did not even know how to open their mouth. At Michigan Creek we decided to continue to Darling Creek. Shortly after Michigan Creek we could see the old boiler of a steamship disappearing in the rising tide.

It was only shortly after 2 o'clock but we found a nice campsite up in the forest with some structure to sit on built at the beach below it. So far the West Coast Trail was everything else than challenging, it was more like walking in Stanley Park. There is also a nice waterfall at Darling Creek. Björn and I wanted to go swimming in the sea first and then at the waterfall. But the water is so cold that we changed our plans (we were not the only ones doing so) and only washed ourselves at the waterfall. That was cold enough! We then made some firewood, had our dinner and finally enjoyed a quite big bonfire.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> day – Tsusiat Falls (Aug 25, 2005)**

Today we started hiking along the beach. At Tsocowis Creek the beach route ends and we had to climb up to a suspension bridge which spans a quite impressive canyon. Shortly thereafter some ladders lead up to the top of the cliff. From time to time we had nice views down to the cliffs. The Pacific was very calm, like it's name suggests. When we came back down to the beach we had low tide. This was very good because only then it is possible to walk on the rocks for most of the distance. This is a lot easier than trudging over the soft sand. Also it is interesting to see little crabs, colourful anemones, sea urchins and some other interesting things in the little ponds which remain at low tide. At one place seals were lying lazy in the sun and a few otters were swimming in the water.

Unfortunately these walkable riffs had an end and we had to hike on the sandy beach which really is hard work. But we were rewarded by spotting a whale blowing off from time to time. At Klanawa River we met about a billion seagulls. Of course it was stinking disgustingly and also the river's water was clearly contaminated. Here we also met a film crew. They were taking footage for a documentation about a handicapped person on the West Coast Trail. This guy had a specially constructed wheelchair. It was designed so that one person can pull in the front and another one push at the rear and it had only one wheel in the middle. For the sandy beach sections they attached an additional harness so that two more persons were able to pull it. They were making only slow progress, but I think they had a lot of fun.

In the early afternoon we arrived at Tsusiat Falls. The River was carrying only very little water, so that the waterfalls were not as impressive as they look like in some popular photos. Nevertheless it was very nice to see them. There is a big beach at the falls, and I think almost everybody stays here for a night. It was really packed and there was hardly any good firewood left. In general the amount of people on the trail is not too bad. During the day you usually hike alone and the beaches have enough space to accommodate all hikers (most of the time). And even if you are surrounded by other groups you can hardly hear them because the crushing waves are always drowning out other voices.

The trail down to the Tsusiat beach is about 100 meters south of the bridge over the river. It was very hot and luckily we found one of the rare places with some shadow on the beach. Björn and I first went swimming in the ocean (only very short... soooo cold!). After that the water coming down the falls felt like a warm shower. Paddling in the waterfall's pond was very enjoyable. After filtering water with Martin we were all lying in the sun lazily and Björn lit a nice little fire after our dinner. These fires at night are really great because there is always a cool draft coming in from the sea.

Since August 25 also marks my first year in Canada we had some Vanilla Mousse with raspberries. Don't buy this in MEC, it was disgusting (buy Mousse au Chocolat instead).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> day – Cribs Creek (Aug 26, 2005)**

The day started sunny and by the time we finished our breakfast the sun dried our tents. But all of a sudden fog came in from the sea and the tents were dripping wet immediately. The fog drifting over the beach up to the cliff together with the last sun rays shining through it made a ghostlike scenery. We hiked along the beach to the stone arch at Tsusiat Point. Unfortunately the thick fog made everything look like black and white images. But this kind of fog makes this coast what it is like. All the swampy jungle-like coastal rainforest needs the fog to stay green. We met some people who were telling us that the hard parts of the trail would still lie ahead of us. So far we did not encounter any difficulties. Even Wolfi did not have any problems with his feet (unlike in the Stein Valley).

On the way to Nitinat Narrows nothing special happened. From time to time we had some foggy views down to the coast – they had their own beauty. As long as we were walking the fog did not bother us, even though it was almost raining. But when we had to wait ten minutes for the ferry over Nitinat Narrows it was quite chilly. After crossing the river we had some barbecued salmon, it was insanely expensive (\$15 – and it was not very much), but also very good. Right after that we had a very long boardwalk until we reached a point where the whole boardwalk was flooded. So we had to detour through some mudholes. At Cheewhat River there is a nice suspension bridge. At around kilometer 39 we were unsure if the tide would allow us to take the beach route. We decided that it would be risky and it looked like it could be a trap in case we hike on. So we returned back and took a beach access up to the forest. We arrived at Cribs Creek in dense fog – so dense that you could easily oversee that there is a campsite.

We built a tarp over a wooden structure which was already there. This kept the fog away from us and it was a lot warmer underneath the tarp, especially after Björn and Wolfi lit a fire right beside it. For a few minutes some sun rays found the way through the fog and we could see blue sky. But later on the fog was again so dense that it was hard to see anything but white water droplets in the shine of the headlamp. I also found out that I forgot the tea bags at home. We had some warm milk instead, but milk powder tastes not at all delightful!

## **4<sup>th</sup> day – Cullite Creek (Aug 27, 2005)**

In the morning it was still foggy and drizzling. Luckily we did not take down our tarp, so that we still had a dry place to have breakfast. It was very unpleasant to take down the tent in the wet sand. We started on the forest route just to stay away from the dense fog coming in from the sea. But this turned out to be very slow, the usual route here is the beach route. So we decided to go back to the beach and reached Carmanah Lighthouse. The weather was clearing up. The lighthouse is a nice place with green lawn, vegetable patches and some whale bones.

After that a nine kilometer long beach walk started. We were again lucky to have low tide, so that we were able to walk most of the distance either on wet sand or over rocks. We were able to pass Carmanah Creek without using the cable car. There is also a woman selling burgers at the northern end of the beach, but we didn't stop since we just had breakfast. At Bonilla Point we had a section of deep sand and at this place the sun finally came through the clouds. The area around Vancouver Point was mostly made up of rocks so that we reached Walbran Creek relatively quickly. We again had only very little water in the Creek, so that we could walk through it without getting wet feet. I would recommend to ask oncoming hikers about the creek's water level. At high level it might be advisable to use the forest route.

From Walbran Creek on southwards the trail goes inlands. It gets a lot muddier than we had it ever before and finally we reach the area with the long ladders. Yet we were making relatively good progress, for sure we were faster than one kilometer per hour like we were told during the info session at the beginning. The suspension bridge over Logan Creek was very sketchy. The campsites down there looked nice but we decided to go on to Cullite Creek, so that the next day which should bring us to Thrasher Cove would not be too long. Later we were told that the campsites at Logan Creek are not the best because the access trail gets flooded during heavy rain. At the Cullite Creek cable car we met a guy who was planning to do the whole West Coast Trail in one day. From here on he still had some 20 kilometers to go and it was already 4 o'clock. He admitted that he was a little tired!

The campsite at Cullite Creek is very nice. It is in the forest, covered by trees and it's a pebble beach. That means less sand and a different sound made by the waves. The sound was also especially cool since the whole beach and campsite is situated in a canyon which made a very nice echo. Unfortunately it started drizzling again. While I was filtering water with Martin, Björn and Wolfi found a nice fireplace under a cliff, so that the rain did not bother us any more. The waves sounded like dolby digital surround and we enjoyed the Mousse au Chocolat. Throughout the night we were hearing some thunder like noise which I thought of it being the waves...

## **5<sup>th</sup> day – Thrasher Cove (Aug 28, 2005)**

In the morning it was still raining. Quickly I found out what was making the thunder like sound throughout the night. It was the formerly peaceful creek! Yesterday Cullite Creek was draining away in a basin which was fairly nice to swim in. Now the creek's

water level was about half a meter higher and it was flowing out into the sea rapidly. The sound we heard was the water forming the new creek bed.

Soon after this discovery (which made clear that you should choose the campsite carefully) the drizzling rain stopped – instead it started pouring. It appeared to us that it was raining so much that the milk in our cereal bowls simply didn't get less, no matter how fast we were spooning it up. Instead our jackets got white sprinkles of splashing milk. Little streams started to flow underneath our tents and packing our stuff today was a real mess. Now it was not only sand (from the day before), but also needles sticking everywhere to the tent. Of course it stopped raining shortly after we took off! To keep my shoes dry I was wearing the pants over my gaiters. This turned out to be a bad idea because soon the pants were so dirty that I couldn't put them inside the gaiters again.

Over roots, sketchy log bridges, through mud holes and ladders the trail is winding around gigantic trees like in a maze. I think there would be no way out of here without the trail. Some of the log bridges are pretty high, but none of us had problems in balancing over them. Obviously some people prefer walking on the ground, even if that is usually the worse route. Progress is relatively slow and for me it was inevitable to finally get soaked shoes. It just happens too often that you dip into a puddle. I was using my hiking poles to make long steps and hop up and down the slippery logs. One of Wolfi's hiking poles disintegrated and I really wonder how he made his way through all this mess with only one pole! Like a ballet dancer. Through the dense forest we could see that the sun came out again and the forest ground started to fume. Then something really funny happened. We met a group of young girls and guys. One of the guys recognized us and said: "Hey, didn't we meet in Stein Valley last week?" Canada is small!

At noon we arrived at Camper Creek. On a big log we dried some of our wet stuff and ate several cereal bars, of which we all had more than enough. We also filtered water since we didn't feel like doing that in the morning's rain. About one hour after we departed at Camper Creek we had a last look over the open Pacific at the beach access. Today it was wild and the fog came in again. Unfortunately the tides didn't allow us to take the beach route to Thrasher Cove. The inland route again goes over the same obstacles as we had them already earlier today. This stretch of the trail seemed to be endless. We passed many groups which made even less progress than we did, even though their day must have been shorter than ours. Finally at kilometer 70 we arrived at the Thrasher Cove branch. From here it is another kilometer down to the beach. I believe we arrived between 5 and 6 pm and the beach was already filling up. We picked two campsites on the beach, overseeing that there are also some in the forest. The tide is coming up pretty far, so try to stay up high. The weather was nice at the beach but we could see that it is still foggy at the outer shore. We couldn't find a lot of good firewood. Our fire was small and it was smoking a lot. Of course it started to rain in the night – in the morning our tent will be all wet and sandy again.

## **6<sup>th</sup> day – Port Renfrew (Aug 29, 2005)**

The morning was sunny and we were heading out for the last six kilometers to the ferry at the Port Renfrew trail head. The forest closer to Port Renfrew is a second growth forest and we passed some old and rusty steel cables and a steam donkey. It must have been an incredibly hard work to lumber these gigantic trees at the turn of the century. After about two hours on the trail we met the first ongoing group. They told us that it took them one and a half hours to get here. Missing the challenge on the West Coast Trail so far I thought it should be possible to do it in half the time. The trail was not very exciting and the terrain was easy. I didn't have to take care of any mud holes. At one point I thought it would be impossible and I had a break. But when I arrived at Gordon River at 12 o'clock it turned out that I made it in just a few minutes over three quarters of an hour.

I only had to wait 15 minutes for Martin, Wolfi and Björn to arrive. Together we took some photos of us in front of the "Pacific Rim National Park" plate and also of our muddy legs and boots before we called the Gordon River ferry to the trailhead. There we were handed out our West Coast Trail certificates. Björn's name was of course spelled completely wrong, instead of Björn Bäbler it turned out that Bjorn Babler did the West Coast Trail.

Port Renfrew's shuttle service brought us from the trail head office back to the parking lot at the Lighthouse Pub where our car was parked. We packed our stuff into the car, hopped into fresh clothes and drove back to Victoria. There we satisfied our ravenousness for a quick and hefty meal at Dairy Queen before we took the ferry back to Vancouver.

## **The West Coast Trail... a walk in the park**

Yes... the treacherous West Coast Trail is indeed a walk in the park. With some hiking experience there is nothing to fear, there is no challenge (except you try to make it in a very short time...) and I don't know why they have to evacuate people from the trail (more than 70 in 2005 at the time we've been there). I guess it is mainly due to bad preparation and inappropriate gear.

Of course the coast has it's beauty – by no means I want to say that it's not worth it. I really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and the fire every night. The many people didn't bother us too much either. But I would not do the West Coast Trail again (unlike the Stein Valley Traverse or something similar). The alpine is simply more exciting!