



# FOOTPRINTS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND TRAIL

[www.vi-trail.ca](http://www.vi-trail.ca)

**Winter, 2021/22**

## **CONTENTS**

**President's Message**

**Terry's "Zones and Subzones" (Part 4)**

**A Worldly Climber & Trekker's Take on VITA**

**Sightings Along the Trail**

### **A New Year's Message From VITA's President, Liz Bicknell**



Happy New Year. 2022 certainly got off to a bang with a Tsunami warning for coastal areas. No doubt there will be more excitement in store for us this year.

Your board at VITA continues to work hard on your behalf. We had a successful virtual AGM October 26, 2021. It was great to welcome several new members and volunteers. We've had a busy and productive 2021 and we can really see the light at

the end of the tunnel in terms of completing the trail. We also had a good year from a fundraising perspective. Our goal is to do even better this year.

As President, I continue to reach out to our Indigenous neighbours. The conversations have begun with the Songhees, Namgis and Malahat Nations. As well, if Covid does not get in the way, your board will be participating in the Kairos Blanket Exercise along with the Board at the EcoForestry Institute in Ladysmith. The plan is for this to take place in an outdoor setting and May is tentatively set as the timeframe. For those of you unfamiliar with this exercise, the blanket exercise is an interactive educational program that teaches the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The program was created in response to the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and is used as a teaching tool across Canada.

Going forward the board will remain as a working board and there are no plans to hire any paid employees. However there are a few skill sets that need to be added to the current board. They are as follows:

**Secretary/Admin Person** to lighten the administrative workload.

**Duties of the Secretary** – The Board Secretary shall record the minutes of all meetings of the Board of Directors, maintain records of committee meetings, oversee the maintenance of membership lists, provide for the safe keeping of all official contracts and records of the organization and publish notices of scheduled meetings as required in the Bylaws.

**Fundraising/Sponsorship Director** to advise and manage fundraising activities in a very competitive market.

**Duties of the Fundraising Person:** To direct and advise on best practices in the fundraising realm. Whilst all board members can, and should, vigorously support the fundraising program. There are many ways to be involved, even if you are not directly asking for funds. Everyone needs to join in and help make fundraising successful! However, the Board needs one director to oversee this.

**Archivist** – the records of VITA are very valuable and could benefit greatly with the advice of an experienced archivist. This position could be in an advisory capacity and would not require you being a board member.

**Duties of the Archivist:** responsible for the provision, care and management of permanent collections of information that are intended to preserve the past and allow others to discover it.

If you feel you have the skills for any of the above positions, I would love to hear from you. Please contact me at [president@vi-trail.ca](mailto:president@vi-trail.ca) or any of the board members directly for further discussion.

Thank you.

Liz

*(Editor's note: You can check out VITA's existing Board Members on the [web site](#))*

## Terry's "Zones and Subzones"

### THE WET SUBZONE OF THE COASTAL WESTERN HEMLOCK ZONE

#### Part 4 of a Series

As I said last time, 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 look at the wet subzone of CWH – that still leaves the even wetter hypermaritime (how wet can it get?) and higher-elevation montane variants for Parts 5 and 6.

We essentially lose Douglas-fir in the Wet subzone. Why is that? – no longer is the summer climate dry enough for stand-replacing wildfires. In the many soil pits that I dug over several decades, I only rarely found any charcoal at the base of (or within) the forest floor (charcoal is essentially inert and we know it hangs around for centuries). There are a few localized exceptions where there was fire and one can also find lone firs or a small group of Douglas-fir on very dry rock outcrops or on limestone, and even on steep, south-facing slopes – but these are few and far between.

Even without the D-fir, this remains a very productive forested subzone with mature and old trees commonly 50+ metres in height with a diversity of tree species and stand types comprised of western hemlock, western redcedar, amabilis fir (aka 'balsam' or Pacific silver fir), with impressive Sitka spruce on rich alluvial sites and scrubby shore pine on thin discontinuous soils with extensive bare rock outcrops (and in bogs).

In the transition to the higher-elevation, montane variant of this Wet Subzone, the redcedar may become mixed with some yellow cedar ('cypress') – this is at elevations of 550-600 metres on steep slopes and as low as 450 metres on moderate to gentle slopes.

Instead of the wildfires of the dry and moist CWH, wind is the main disturbance agent in the wet CWH. This gives rise to two predominant stand types. Western hemlock and hemlock-balsam stands (with little or no redcedar) result from 'catastrophic' stand-replacing windfall events. Indeed, in such stands, there is invariably a sub-canopy of seedling to sapling sized hemlock and balsam ready to go as soon as the main forest canopy blows down. On the contrary, redcedar-

dominated stands, with a variable component of hemlock and balsam, appear to develop in the absence of so-called catastrophic windfall (I think an unfortunate, misleading use of the term!). In such stands, scattered small-scale windfall (patch replacement) is the norm, likely because the lower density of the redcedar canopy and the more open, thin crowns of the cedars reduce the likelihood and extent of windfall. In addition, such redcedar stands commonly persist for centuries because of the great longevity of western redcedar trees and resistance of the wood of redcedar to decay. Ancient spike-topped cedars and 'candelabra' crown forms with very little live crown are the evidence of the truly ancient cedars. Compare this with hemlock and balsam, which due to relatively rapid wood decay are soon on the ground once the top dies back or breaks off.

**Windfall Origin Hemlock Stand**



So, what does the ground cover look like in the wet CWH? On 'average' or so-called zonal sites and soils, the two main canopy types give rise to distinctly different minor vegetation. Under the relatively dense hemlock and hemlock-balsam stands, the moss layer predominates with few herbs and ferns and scattered red huckleberry and blueberries (the 'blueberry-moss' association). Step moss and lanky moss form extensive

beds. In sharp contrast, comparable sites under the more open redcedar-dominant stands have minor vegetation dominated by salal which responds to the higher light intensity under the open canopy. Indeed, other than the salal and a few mosses, a list of plants in this 'salal association' is usually pretty short.

**Open Redcedar Stand With Thick Salal Cover**



As throughout the entire range of the CWH Zone, truly diagnostic species are in short supply; consequently, it is the differences in tree species (alone) that best distinguishes the various *subzones and variants*.

Richer sites of Wet CWH are evidenced mainly by sword fern and salmonberry similar to the drier subzones, with variable lesser cover of foamflowers, other ferns and members of the lily family. On wetter sites you will see deer fern and then skunk cabbage on truly poorly drained sites and depressions.

More on particularly interesting 'special' sites (alluvial, limestone, wetlands, early seral...) in a later article.

*T. Lewis – January 2022*



## A Worldly Climber & Trekker Offers His Take on VITA

*(Editor's note: Casey Henley has guided, climbed and Trekked throughout the "Seven Continents" of our world. He is currently Head Climbing & Skiing Instructor for State University of New York's Expeditionary Studies Degree)*



In the early '90s, I traveled to the Island with some college friends to hike the West Coast Trail. That trip was my first time exploring the wilderness of Vancouver Island. I've since had the good fortune to live and work on the Island and experience the incredible diversity of its ocean to mountain environments. From beautiful, mellow hiking trails that are accessible for everyone, world-class mountain biking, backcountry skiing, the Golden Hinde Traverse, and rugged alpine climbing - the Vancouver Island wilderness has something for everyone! The Vancouver Island Trail is an amazing resource for both Islanders and travelers to the region. Whether you are going for a short day hike or attempting the trail in its 800km. entirety, incredible adventures await!

C. Henley – January 2022



## We Close With a Few Sights You Will Experience Along the VI Trail

### Cluxewe River Sunset



### One of several lakes in the headwaters of Hal Creek



### View of Buttle Lake taken from the nearby Mount Adrian weather station



## **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:  
[IslandHikerGuy@GMail.Com](mailto:IslandHikerGuy@GMail.Com)*

## **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](#)*

