

Two Mystical to Believe  
By Ron Kirstein, Edited by Lisa Cole

There are two places on Vancouver Island that are, in my opinion, mystical. When you first set eyes on these special places, the only word that keeps coming to mind is MYSTICAL!



Long Beach - West Coast of Vancouver Island



Spectacular water views near Ucluelet

The most special of all is Long Beach. Twenty five kilometers of incredibly white sandy beaches washed with rolling breakers coming off the wild Pacific Ocean. It offers some of the best "winter storm watching" available anywhere. Thirty foot waves can pound the coast during the spectacular winter storms stacking huge logs on the beach like matchsticks. On a clear sunny day you feel like you are in heaven. On a overcast day, the mysticism strengthens. The majesty of the scenery just makes you want to come back again and again.

One time, on a family camping trip to the area, a few things went awry. The first night, we realized we forgot the lantern. We picked up a cheap one and it exploded as our son put it together. Then we discovered the propane stove line was almost severed! The next day, the transmission on the van went. While towing it to Port Alberni, the tow truck driver was going down a steep hill and side-swiped a post - with our van. A friend lent me a vehicle so we could drive to Port Alberni, rent a car, then drive back to Long Beach to return his vehicle. Then, we drove the 5 hours back to Victoria, all this driving in one day. (The kids were unimpressed.) This brief summary doesn't do justice to the events that unfolded. It is hard to believe that we actually enjoyed the time we were there with all that happened, but we did. When you go, you'll see why. Now we just look back at this trip and laugh.



Spectacular Views 'Wild Pacific Trail' Ucluelet



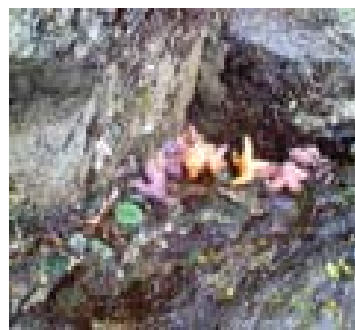
grey whale tale

I have tons of great memories: long walks on spectacular beaches, watching the great tail of a grey whale diving, flying over this spectacular area, soaking in the natural hot springs, playing in the big surf, the giant trees on Meares Island and so much more! When you go to the Long Beach area, be sure to visit the Wild Pacific Trail in Ucluelet for spectacular ocean views on a very easy walk. Start from the Amphetrilite Light Station. Play in the waves, you might want to rent a wet suit, depending on the weather. The water is cool. Get out on the water (go whale watching or on a sight-seeing excursion).

Take the water taxi to Meares Island to see the giant trees. The first real "war over the woods" was staged here to save these magnificent giants. It is about 15 minutes by water taxi to the drop off point just below the island boardwalk. They leave you there and come back in 90 minutes. This is ample time to walk into the island and see these special trees (shown on the right). They are monsters, hundreds of years old. There is a boardwalk all the way to the trees and lots to see. This is a beautiful area but always remember you are in a rainforest zone and rain can come at the most inopportune times- dress accordingly! The periodic rain does not deter the million or so visitors that come to this area every year. You'll see why. A good water taxi guide will also give you a bit of a tour on the way out and back. The boat ride is only about 15 minutes from the docks. The water taxi is usually an open boat.



The giant trees on Meares

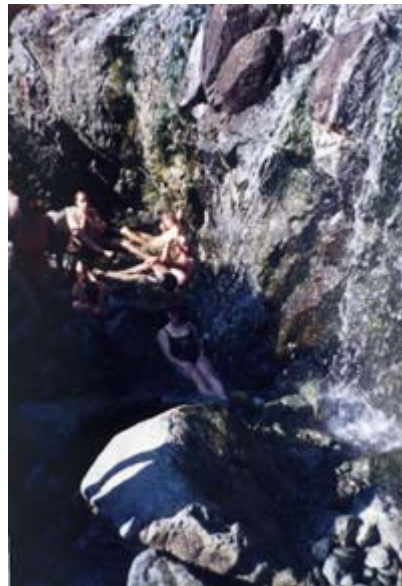


Florencia Beach left - Tide pool right  
Overcast day below left - The rock on Long Beach below right



If you have some time on your hands, take the trip up to Hot Springs Cove. The springs are in a creek that ambles down to the ocean. You can sit in the lower pools in hot steamy water and then be quickly cooled by a surge from the ocean. This is a very unique experience. You get there by chartered boat or float plane from Tofino. This trip takes the better part of a day and you might see whales along the way.

If you do nothing else, be sure to go to this beautiful spot on beautiful Vancouver Island. It takes half the day to drive there from Victoria, slightly less from Nanaimo. You can also fly into the airport there on small commuter planes. However you get there, be sure to go.



Hot Springs Cove

If you drive west from Victoria, through Sooke and on to Port Renfrew, you may find your way to my second mystical spot. It is called Botanical Beach. It was once a research station for Washington State University. At low tides, especially in May and June, a whole shelf of the ocean is exposed, leaving the most magnificent tide-pools anywhere. It is like walking into the deep ocean.





You just never know what you will find in these pools. The smaller ones might only be 3 feet across, but the larger ones are huge (see left). They are full of sea urchins, limpets, mussels, and other creatures that live in the intertidal zone. Small fish are common and on one occasion we found an octopus in only 4 inches of water. The sights and sounds here are fascinating.

All around, the scenery is spectacular, from the rugged cliffs behind you, to the blue waters of Juan de Fuca Strait. You are sitting at the mouth of Juan de Fuca Strait where it empties into the Pacific Ocean. The waves here can be large, so it is wise to stop and watch what the water is doing before you get close to the shoreline. The waves usually come in sets of 3 or 4 small ones followed by 3 or 4 big ones. See how far up the big ones are coming and then stay well away from where they are landing.



It has taken thousands of years for these tide pools to form. This one was likely formed by a small boulder rolling around and around as the tide crashed for hundreds of years.

On a bright sunny day, this place feels like heaven. On cloudy days, there is so much to see and do, you will forget the clouds.

The hike to the beach from the parking lot takes 20 minutes. When you get to the beach, go left to the point for best viewing.

When you travel to this area, you are going through lots of wilderness. Eagles, bears and cougars live in these bushes and trees, so you never know what you might see. This is a park, so you will always get warnings if there are wild animal sightings. You cannot take things from this park, so leave the sea life where you find it. This is such a special area, please leave it the way you find it. Enjoy mystical beach Number Two!



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