

## WHETHER YOU'RE AMBLING OR HARD-CORE HIKING, THE SUNSHINE COAST TRAIL DELIVERS BEAUTY

BY JANE MUNDY

PHOTO BY DARREN ROBINSON, TOURISM POWELL RIVER

The 180-km-long Sunshine Coast Trail stretches from Sarah Point by Lund south to Saltery Bay, south of Powell River.

**A**FTER SEVERAL hours of hiking on the Sunshine Coast Trail, I have only one regret — I didn't bring a frying pan. I would have loved to sauté the chanterelle mushrooms I had just picked along the trail over the fire pit at the Rainy Day Lake hut, where we stop for lunch. But we make do with the sandwiches that my guide, Powell River resident Eagle Walz, has brought along.

Depending on the time of year, you might also be able to forage for fiddleheads, berries and oysters along the trail, which starts at Sarah Point, the northern tip of the coast, and winds down to Saltery Bay. Wild foods aside, the trail has much to offer: mountain ridges and ocean shores; creeks, rivers and lakes; and swaths of old-growth forest.

It's more accessible and "user-friendly" than the renowned West Coast trail. There's no charge, no reservations required, and no line-ups. And seven volunteer-built cabins provide year-round shelter — *gratis*.

If you're in good shape you can hut-to-hut hike the 180-kilometre trail in eight or nine days, which is roughly 21 or so kilometres per day, averaging five hours a day. Time it right and there's a roof over your head each night.

But you can also just amble along in your own sweet time. If you're in my camp and prefer more luxury after a hard day's hike, a number of hotels and B&Bs will pick up and return you to the trail the next day. You can also drive

(anywhere from five to 90 minutes) to all 30 sub-trails — they all connect, making one continuous trail. (Walz advises that you get information on current conditions at the Powell River Visitors Bureau and pick up *The Sunshine Coast Trail* book for detailed maps.)

We pack out everything we pack in (the unspoken rule and requested by First Nations peoples as you go through their territory); circumnavigate Rainy Day Lake (ideal for swimming and camping); then turn onto Fairview Bay Trail. It takes us through old-growth forest of Western red cedar and Douglas fir and down to the ocean's edge, with a stunning view clear across Jervis Inlet. It's a short hop from here to Saltery Bay, southerly terminus of the trail and the BC Ferries dock.

Walz and others recommend everyone walk the Sunshine Coast Trail from north to south. That way everyone is travelling in the same direction and so you are not constantly meeting other walkers head on. "You have more solitude and you avoid crowds," says Walz, who darts ahead to pick up a scrap of plastic (the only piece of litter I spy on our seven-kilometre hike). Crowds? We haven't seen anyone all day.

Walz says deer are common and you might see a black bear, but it's highly unlikely you'll see a cougar or grizzly — they stick to the back-country or inlets.

Chances are you'll come to Powell River from Comox, but still start at Sarah Point, about 15 kilometres north of Lund and 35 kilometres from Powell River. "Most people take the 30-minute water taxi from Lund, through the Copeland Island

provincial park to Sarah Park,” says Walz. “They get dropped off at Sarah Point, hike to Wednesday Lake and if they don’t continue trekking southward on the SCT, walk out to Lund.” That entire trip is about 16 kilometres and up to seven hours, not counting swimming or shucking oysters at Cochrane Bay.

Two parts of the trail are beach front: from Sarah Point to Cochrane Bay you can go beachcombing at a variety of access points, and the trail hugs the coast from Fairview Bay to Saltery Bay at the southerly end.

Sedentary types and families usually circumnavigate the lake at Inland Lake Park near Powell River. It’s 13 kilometres and wheelchair accessible. If you have kids in tow, stroll the Trinket Trail and Troll Alley, where hundreds of trinkets hang from trees and mossy stumps.

The trail grew out of a desire by Walz and others in the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society (he is the group’s president) to set aside protected wilderness areas. “We realized the only way of getting people interested in saving those trees was to make them accessible,” says Walz, “and the only way to do that was to make a trail.” Along the way the society received various grants to pay for materials and transportation, but for the most part, volunteers built the trail and the huts: three more shelters, one winterized, should be built by the end of this year.

The society has placed 10,000 orange metal markers to guide the way. “It’s not impossible to get lost, but you can always see the next marker from the last one,” says Walz. Cell phone reception is good if you are near the top of a ridge or on a mountain and facing the ocean, but keep in mind that valleys have no reception.

Pick up a map at the Powell River Visitors Bureau and note conditions posted on [sunshinecoast-trail.com](http://sunshinecoast-trail.com). Always tell someone where you are going and which trail you’re on.

## IF YOU GO

The Upper Sunshine Coast is easily accessible to Vancouver Islanders: a ferry ride from Comox to Powell River takes 90 minutes. Good news for boaters: Powell River and Lund had an extensive harbour expansion over the past year.

The trail shelters are sparse, shared-use facilities and not stocked with anything, but there is a food preparation counter, a picnic table and upstairs a sleeping loft. No reservations are required — at least not so far.

Or day-hike and stay in one of several hotels or B&Bs in and around Powell River. Check [discoverpowellriver.com/accommodation/](http://discoverpowellriver.com/accommodation/). After my four-hour hike, I checked into Bliss Spa for a massage and floated upstairs to my suite, complete with soaker tub and super-plush robe. Bliss has just four rooms so book ahead. Two blocks away is the Alchemist, an intimate French restaurant that serves the best cuisine in town, in my view. The runner-up is the Laughing Oyster, near the Desolation Sound Resort, which overlooks Okeover Inlet near Lund — ideal for kayakers. **VB**



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