

Discovering the Secrets of the Coast

Beverley Sinclair has climbed the highest mountain in southeast Asia, ridden a camel through the dizzying heat of the Sahara sand dunes, hiked the mountains and beaches of Tenerife, lived for a time with a Native tribe in Borneo...and now it's time for her to explore the riches of the natural wonders in her own backyard.

While researching her book, *Western Journeys: Discovering the Secrets of the Land*, Sinclair realized there was much more to the dramatic wilderness of the British Columbia coast than could ever be contained within its pages. And as editor of Canada's largest weekly news magazine, she has become intrigued by the stories she's heard about coastal Native culture and about some remarkable creatures: orcas, grizzlies, and sealife so spectacular that B.C. waters are considered among the best in the world for diving. Her forays by sailboat into B.C.'s islands have also fuelled a deep desire to explore the part of the world she has chosen to live in, a place that has "called" her since she was a child living on the Canadian prairie. After having lots of adventures in other parts of the world, she is planning to bring her strong sense of curiosity and love of adventure home, to embark on what will be, for her, the trip of a lifetime.

We'll go to one of the most exciting places in the world to kayak: among the Orcas of Robson Bight, where we meet a researcher who lives near these spectacular creatures and is one of the world's authorities on all aspects of their behaviour. Perhaps a whale will breach behind us as the scientist explains the family structure of this animal that is at the centre of so many Native myths and ceremonies. Another stop on the journey will be a walk among some of the largest and oldest living things on earth. The huge old-growth trees of the Carmannah Forest on Vancouver Island are a reminder of the natural history of the entire province. On the way there, we'll visit the small town of Tofino and meet some of the locals who get to live in this beautiful area: loggers, fishermen, Native artists, and wilderness guides.

The Graveyard of the Pacific provides us with more stories from B.C.'s history. Along Vancouver Island's west coast, shipwrecks and the legends about them abound. Adjacent to the graveyard, we don our hiking boots and packs to hike part of the West Coast trail, one of the most difficult wilderness hikes in the world. When we leave the trail, we carry on by kayak to the Broken Islands Group and see firsthand why B.C. has the reputation that it does among the world's divers. Here, among more than 100 small islands, there is spectacularly colourful intertidal life and intriguing shipwrecks to explore.

The next truly unique stop on the journey is Triangle Island, off the north tip of Vancouver Island, where thousands upon thousands of seabirds, including puffins, live. Here, too, we meet a world-renowned researcher, who during summer months lives an unusual life, isolated on this island with only the calls of the west-coast birds for company and the sight of the sky filled with their wings at dusk.

The eery ghost town of Ocean Falls is a long ferry trip from Port Hardy on Vancouver Island's north coast to the B.C. mainland, a trip through spectacular westcoast scenery. The town is home now to a few eccentrics and 60s style homesteaders, but the homes, businesses, and streets all seem to be waiting for the bustle of activity, which never comes. At the end of the Discovery Coast passage, we disembark at Bella Coola, where a local Native takes us on a walk through the dense rainforest and explains the medicines growing all around us.

A short seaplane trip, and we'll be searching Princess Royal Island for another coastal secret: the rare Kermode Bear, also known as the Spirit Bear not found anywhere else on earth. These remarkable animals are white, although they are part of the black-bear family, and are astoundingly curious about people, probably because so few humans ever visit their island home. We'll hear many stories about these elusive and strange creatures. Not far away, back on the mainland at the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Reserve, we'll visit the wilderness area where many of B.C.'s grizzly bears live, and see and learn about these enormous, unpredictable, and beautiful animals that strike fear in the hearts of most and have strong symbolic meaning to Native people. Stunning scenery, including a labyrinth of fjords and tiny islands is all we can see below us as we take a seaplane to one of the coast's most magical spots: Haida Gwaii. Here, we near the end of our journey of discovering the secrets of the coast by meeting a local Native who takes us to the places in this pristine wilderness which have significance to his people, including the largest collection of original standing totem poles in the world.

And all along the way, we are surprised by people we meet and experiences we have that help us to discover the secrets of the coast and the significant role of nature in the lives of coastal people.