

# WESTCOAST TRAIL EXPERIENCE

*“To seek a path of richness....  
trust the spirit”*

## Synopsis

People come from around the world to tackle the Westcoast Trail, one of the most grueling treks in North America. 10,000 hikers will pick-up their backpacks this year and head out on 47 miles of some of the wildest coastline in the world.

Why do they come? What does it mean to them to experience 5 to 7 day's of breathtaking natural wonder? What of the physical and mental endurance? Meeting challenges face to face and feeling the spirit of adventure are just part of what makes Eco-adventure-tourism the most exciting travel experience.

Travel back to the turn of the century when the Westcoast trail was first carved out of the wilderness for those fortunate mariners who survived the tumultuous seas of a coastline that was known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific.” Here, many shipwrecked seamen and passengers perished in some of the most grisly ocean-going disasters of all time.

Meet the native peoples, both present and past. Discover their traditional way of life and unique understanding of the evolution of the area.

Experience the beauty and wildness of a unique adventure along the coastal waters of the Pacific Ocean. Marvel at the site of a pod of breaching Killer whales on their annual migration through these water.

Discover the incredible flora and fauna of the temperate rainforest eco-system which spans this stretch of coastline and the wildlife that call it home.

Gain insight into the region's struggle for survival: the battle between the fibre hungry logging companies and tenacious environmental groups struggling to control this strip of ancient rainforest.

*“There is a presence in these wild places... a magical spirit, a power as real and profound as any in nature. Listen in your quiet places for the echo song the wilds sing. Dreamer's hear it... .... and whose who's horizons hold no fear are called here and they must come.”*

--“Out of the Silence”, YUKON PAVILION, 1986

[a:Trail/04/30/97](#)

## Concept

People have to book months in advance to hike the Westcoast trail for which they sometimes travel for many days and thousands of miles at great expense. For some hikers, it may rain for 8 days solid, or they may have to push themselves to physical & emotional exhaustion. Why do they come?

The intention is to show what the experience of a wild place has on these individuals -and to contrast that to the fast paced stressful man made world of modern civilization (I.E. Koyanisquatsi).

*Natural landscapes offer intimacy, but they can also help remind us of the insignificance of our species. The sense of insignificance that nature can provide is liberating: without the reassuring vastness of geo-logic time and space, we are simply alone, with our brief and gnawing consciousness.*

*Don Gayton (Natural Landscapes of the Northwest)*

## Treatment

### Profile of the hikers:

The program will begin by profiling the backgrounds of 3 hiker's:

- Japanese (male) from a crowded inner city.
- German (female) from a heavily industrialized area.
- American from a high stress profession

We will intercut the talking head interviews with them in their home environment at work, and play

- I.E.
- driving to work, riding crowded subways
  - working on computers
  - watching TV
  - going to night clubs
  - living in concrete apartment buildings
  - air & noise pollution

Questions asked in their home environments:

- What attracted them to the WC trail?
- What is missing from their environment?
- Are they going just to view natural beauty or are they looking for something inside themselves?
- Do they expect the hike to be more a mental or physical challenge ?

We will intercut maps of the Globe, N. America, Canada, B.C, Vancouver Island, WestCoast Trail with images of them, making their physical journey to the northern trailhead.

- I.E.
- packing their bags, buying supplies
  - at their airport, on the plane
  - Vancouver arrival, B.C. Ferry to Vancouver Island
  - up the Island highway ,through Combs, Cathedral Grove, Port Alberni, down the inlet on the Lady Rose, through the famous Broken Island Group, a favourite recreational area for kayakers, fishermen and scuba divers.....and finally arrival in Bamfield.

Using a chronological account of the trail, we will use landmarks to spring board us into various subjects.

- Ocean life & trail history
- Natural Elements of the stars, the earth, and the tides
- Native perception
- Logging & the Environmental Movement
- Wildlife, Flora & Fauna
- Personal mental & physical test

## Arrival at North Trail Head

Montage of compulsory Parks Canada Registration:

- Wild animal warnings (Cougars & Bears)
- Weather reports
- Images of the Search & Rescue helicopters and boats
- Explanation of how badly injured one must be before they will extricate you
- Park staff review the tide tables, and stress how easily you can be cut off on the beach by the tides leaving no route for escape with sheer cliffs at your back.
- Warning from staff about bridges down, rivers flooded, dangerous surge canals, how deaths on the trail have happened in past & present years. i.e. a rogue wave that washed a girl off the rocks that year

**Their main message.....**

***“ It’s no walk in the park “***

## Day 1-Ocean Life & Trail History

- Images of hiker’s preparing the 60+lbs packs for the hike

### ***Finally... it’s trekking time***

-A map will illustrate the first 3.5 miles of hiking to the Sea Lion’s Rock. Visiting the sea lions sparks discussion on the variety of sea life living on the Westcoast trail route i.e. the giant grey whales making their annual 8000 kilometer migration, a look into micro world of the tidal pools which are teeming with life.

- Map to illustrate next point of interest: Pachena Point Lighthouse. An examination of the architecture of the lighthouse leads in to a discussion of it’s past and we look back to the historical need for the lighthouse.

-Looking back to the tragedies of the shipwrecks in this area it becomes obvious why this stretch of coastline was aptly named “Graveyard of the Pacific. Using a map & animation, we as illustrate how ships looking to find the Georgia Strait passage were pushed by tides, storms and poor visibility into the rocky coast line of Vancouver island.

**Using newspaper stories, sound montages and pencil sketches of the shipwrecks, we recreate the horror of some of these shipwrecks.**

**Sequence of shipwrecks, and events that lead to the creation of the trail**

- 1786 British Sealing Expedition is wrecked
- 1857 The Williams goes down
- 1857 Americans install lighthouse at southern tip of San Juan's, but the British refuse to install lighthouse across the strait on Vancouver Island
- 1888 work starts to build telegraph line between Cape Beale & Victoria. The line was under funded & under maintained. Dozens more ships went down.
- 1895 Janet Cowan - notorious shipwreck
- 1906 Valencia Shipwreck: 154 perish in one of the most grisly shipwrecks of this century- *"crew & passenger women & children were virtually tortured to death in a manner which sent shock waves of revulsion around the world...."* The captain deliberately ran his ship onto the rocks after the hull had been pierced to save it from sinking in deep water. Here it was pummeled relentlessly by cold grey waves, and to stop the women and child from being thrown over board the crew strapped them to the guard rails and rigging. Daybreak brought a grisly spectacle. *"Bodies hung suspended from the rigging like flies in a web....more corpses drifted between ship & shore scoured of flesh & features as if by a giant cheese grater."*
- Through international newspaper reports, the inadequacies of Canada's coastal rescue apparatus were laid bare to an incensed public. An embarrassed Canadian government in Ottawa was prompted to find funds for a lighthouse at Pachena Point & to commit to a complete upgrade of the WC Trail from the Port of San Juan to Cape Beale. *"Finally the Graveyard of the Pacific had so many corpses in it that the stench reached Canada's capital"*.

As we walk along the shore, we see the remains of many of the wrecks that are still scattered along the route.

## Day 2- Forces of Nature

- Hiking along the beach we experience exactly what those unfortunate sailors of the past were pummeled with, as we meet face to face the powerful gale force winds and moisture laden clouds that have traveled thousands of miles across the Pacific to strike the land mass of Vancouver island.
- Daybreak brings a renewed sense of adventure as we have to forge 2 creeks whose bridges have been washed out.
- At Klana River we must take the cable car across this wide expanse of water as the river is too fast and dangerous to cross otherwise.
- Using time-lapse photography we explore the rhythms of the stars, moon, sun and the tides.
- Looking at some of the awesome landscapes before us, one can witness the powerful geographical forces colliding - the Pacific Ocean and continent of North America.
- Tsusiat Falls is a river which falls 200 ft ?? almost directly into the ocean. This is a fantastic site at sun down.
- Set up camp for the night and around the campfire a philosophical discussion is sparked about the need for *wild places* – where one can witness the true hand of god with no interference from man. We meet people from all over the world and hear of their calling to this place.

## Day 3-Native History, Art & Culture

-At Nitnat Narrows, Karl Junior, takes you by boat across the narrows. It is a perfect place to meet fellow trekkers going north & south and to exchange stories about the trail. Karl is on the Quaa's Economic Tribal Counsel which is made up of the three bands whose lands the trail spans.

-This encounter leads into an exploration of the Native connection with the land around the trail, both past & present. Once, powerful tribes were the terror of this coast and to illustrate this we will use historical photos and footage from "Land of the War canoes". We can discuss the very controversial ceremonial whaling expedition planned for the summer of 97, as well as the future plans that the Quaa's counsel has for this area.

-Back to hiking the trail and we soon come to the Cheewhat Creek Suspicion Bridge where we stop for several moments to view the visual splendor before us.

-We go through the ritual of setting up camp for the night at Cribs Creek, a natural breakwater where you see spectacular waves break into a rock wall, and then spill down the backside of the wall like a pulsing waterfall.

## Day 4 Battle over the old growth forest

*"Wild places once lost are lost forever"*

Sierra Club (Our Vanishing Wilderness)

-We are awakened by the longest fog horn on the Westcoast at the Carmanah Lighthouse. Located at the half way point in the trail, their helicopter pad is one of the main locations for extrication. There are some interesting notes in the guest book.

-A gorgeous 1 mile long beach is between the lighthouse and Carmanah Creek. There is a native woman who operates a hamburger stand with cold beer in this stretch of the trail (lots of opportunities for great interviews here).

-Along Carmanah Beach, we come to a resting place for thousands of seabirds, 20 different kinds of Seagulls alone inhabit this area.

- We ride the cable car across Carmanah Creek and are now hiking along the edge of the world famous Carmanah Valley, where we are dwarfed by many of the world's tallest Sitka spruce, some over 700 years old and 32 stories high. These giant trees segue us into the discussion of the environmental fight over this old growth valley.

-Here we gain insight into the regions struggle for survival - the battle between the fibre hungry logging companies and the tenacious environmental groups who both struggled to control this narrow strip of ancient rainforest. Using newspaper clippings, aerial footage of clear cuts, Western Canadian Wilderness stock footage and news coverage we will recreate this landmark environmental victory.

- This could follow with some interview footage with artists (i.e. Robert Bateman) whose works appear in the limited edition book, "Artistic Vision of an Ancient Rainforest", which was produced to raise money for this environmental fight.

## Day 5- Bio-diversity of Flora & Fauna in a temperate rainforest

- A look at animals that inhabit the trail; eagles & hundred of other birds, cougars, bears, etc, leads to discussion of the importance of natural ecosystems.

-We are now hiking from Walbran Creek to Logan creek - the overland route is recommended for the nature lovers as it crosses a unique swampy area and slowly gains altitude, until it drops to the suspension bridge at Logan creek. This section of the trail takes one through a diverse and fragile ecosystem.

-This ancient rainforest holds an incredibly priceless range of bio-diversity from the smallest macro-organism to the mighty giant spruce trees. Using macro photography on a wide variety of plants we will show their detail and complexity.

-Discuss the international research station that has been set-up in the Carmanah Valley to study these unique ecosystems.

-At Logan Creek, we cross the Suspension Bridge, an engineering masterpiece with spectacular & heart thumping views from its centre.

## Day 6 - A Hiker's personal challenge.... "The Laddered hike into *hell!!!*"

- The southern section of the trail is the most difficult, and most hikers have no idea what they are in for and it is truly a test of mental and physical endurance as it requires great stamina. Hiker's are severely tested along this section which includes some of the most challenging, frustrating, muddy, and generally interesting terrain along the entire trail. If it's been raining you may have to hike in mud up to your waist. It also has ladders - lots of them, some with over 200 rungs that never seem to end.

-This stretch can make grown men "cry like babies to be rescued" - and a rescue would occur only with proven serious injury. We will listen to anecdotal stories from Parks Canada personnel about people's desperation and misery during this section.

- This segment is so difficult, even experienced hikers may travel as little as 4.7 miles in a whole day.

## Day 7 -The return from hell...with a new outlook

-The body has taken a thrashing and we will show some of the scars. Your feet can blister to raw flesh depending on weather and footwear. Some unfortunate hikers have had to use Duct tape to replace the soles of their feet!

-The end of the trail is at Thrasher Cove where one waits for Norm Smith or his grandson to come and pick you up and take you across Port of San Juan and to the town of Port Renfrew.

- At this point we interview hikers both coming and going, intercutting them to show the different perspective from a "green" hiker to a seasoned one.

- With the trek of a lifetime behind them, we return to the initial hikers and hear of their personal physical and mental journey. Did the trail meet their expectations? - Did they find what they were looking for? - How do they think this trip has changed them? We will use footage of them at work and play in their homeland, intercut with memorable shots of them on the trail to portray the contrast between their new perspective and changed values as a result of their experiences on the trail.

-Hopefully, this final interview will bring forth some interesting and thoughtful insights as to the impact that such a wilderness experience can have on a modern urbanized individual. In today's increasingly complex and shrinking world where our diminishing natural environments are constantly threatened with extinction, we wish to convey the priceless value in protecting and respecting our wild places if not for their sake then for the sake of humanity and our future generations to come.

*" I stop for a moment and turn back toward the bay for one last look. I hold my breath for one last listen. I clear my "man mind" of it's clutter, and for a moment I'm suffused with a sense of wonder at what nature has put on offer. Then it occurs to me that perhaps I should take a bow of self-congratulation. Not for having survived the trek, although I sure do feel a sense of achievement, but more as an emissary of a species that for once had the collective intelligence to pull back from the brink and preserve this place.*

*(Ian Gill, Hiking on the Edge)*