

# TRAVEL

ANONYMOUS

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VANCOUVER SUN SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2022

SECTION E

It is not a long haul. Getting from city to wilderness takes about 20 minutes. You can have breakfast on a patio overlooking the inner harbour, eat a picnic lunch on a mountaintop overlooking a fiord, and be back in town in time for tea.



Goldstream Falls can be reached on a side route from the Gold Mine Trail, which is an easy-to-moderate hike and is one of Victoria's most popular. *GLEN PETRIE*

# SUPERB HIKES IN VICTORIA

Some of city's greatest attractions are on the fringes



Climbing above the treeline reveals dizzying views on Mount Finlayson.

**GLEN PETRIE**

Victoria has many urban attractions, but some of its greatest assets are found on the city's fringes, in the surrounding mountains, coastline and forest.

It is for this quick access to the outdoors that I moved here years ago. Now I enthusiastically take my visitors to the many excellent hiking trails leading to old-growth rainforest, rocky coves, secluded beaches, and soaring peaks.

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Whether you've done Victoria's downtown or are making your first visit, consider these six treks: some easy, some challenging, all rewarding in their own ways.

## IF YOU GO

Check out: [bcparcs.ca](http://bcparcs.ca); [tourismvictoria.com](http://tourismvictoria.com); [rainforest-tours.ca](http://rainforest-tours.ca); [crd.bc.ca](http://crd.bc.ca); [picnicoffee.com](http://picnicoffee.com); [roastsandwichshop.com](http://roastsandwichshop.com); [redbarnmarket.ca](http://redbarnmarket.ca); [folepi.ca](http://folepi.ca)

The hikes listed can be easily done on your own. If you prefer a professional tour guide, Rainforest Tours runs private or small-group tours to popular hiking destinations. Many downtown hotels will do up a picnic lunch to add a gourmet touch to your outing, as will local eateries like Picnic Too, Roast Sandwich Shop, Red Barn Market or the upscale Fol Epi Organic Bakery.

### GOLD MINE TRAIL (19 KILOMETRES FROM DOWNTOWN)

This easy-to-moderate hike in Goldstream Provincial Park is one

of Victoria's most popular, packing in a towering waterfall, a dramatic train trestle and, in fall, a salmon run that brings bald eagles.

The parking lot is on the wrong side of Highway 1, so head into a tunnel to safely cross to the trail (do not attempt to cross the highway itself) and emerge in a rocky river bed fed by Niagara Falls. Crane your neck; the waterfall is just a little shorter than its famous eastern namesake at 47.5 metres. Follow a muddy track upward, paralleling the cascade, until you reach the top and the abandoned railway trestle.

Part of the defunct Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway, the trestle spans a dizzying canyon. Some people venture onto it but this is discouraged. Situated outside the park boundary, the aging trestle is private property and does not have handrails.

You can extend this short hike by also doing the Upper Goldstream

Trail to the smaller Goldstream Falls. The roughly 10-km round trip passes an old mine shaft, a remnant of a brief gold rush in the area in the 1860s. Your picnic can be enjoyed around a crackling firepit, as Goldstream is one of the few parks that allow fires.

### MOUNT FINLAYSON (19 KILOMETRES FROM DOWNTOWN)

I like Victoria's steepest hike for its workout value and one of the city's best viewpoints. In two kilometres you'll climb to 419 metres.

Striking out from the same parking lot that serves the Gold Mine Trail, but in the opposite direction, head upward. Concrete steps are an option for a short distance, and then you're climbing a sort of natural staircase of large gravel, boulders and tree roots. You might pass parents with toddlers (and even prams!) turning back

in defeat, proving the veracity of the signage: "Mt. Finlayson Trail access is steep, slippery and rugged ... not suitable for small children."

Massive western red cedars and 600-year-old Douglas firs give the lower slopes a pungent, closed in darkness; this is pure primordial rainforest. And suddenly you pop above the treeline onto sun-washed rock. The path is narrow, sometimes hard to find, and the views induce vertigo. Vultures and eagles drift past below you. You'll have to scramble on all fours to pass a few sections of rock, and the footholds can be treacherous in wet weather.

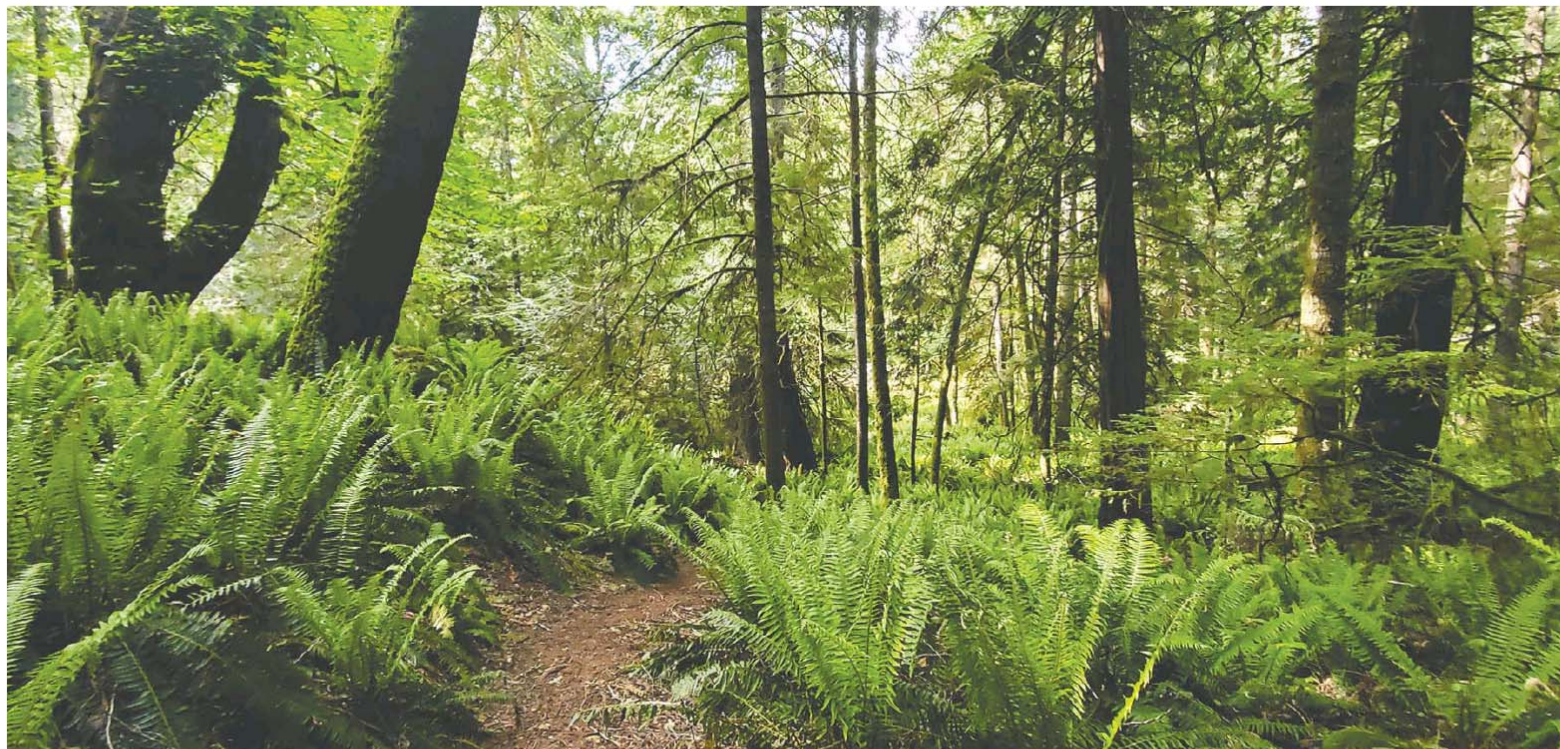
At the bald crown, you'll feel you're on top of the world, with a 270-degree vista taking in Finlayson Arm, neighbouring hills, the distant inner harbour, offshore islands, the snow-capped Olympic Mountains and the white cone of Mt. Baker, 130 kilometres away. SEE HIKES ON E2

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The Matheson Lake Loop Trail passes lush fern grottoes. PHOTOS: GLEN PETRIE

# STUNNING VIEW OF SAANICH



Black bears and cougars are occasionally spotted around the Saanich Inlet, seen here from Jocelyn Hill.

**HIKES FROM E1**

**JOCELYN HILL  
(20 KILOMETRES  
FROM DOWNTOWN)**

The ridge trail to the heights of Jocelyn Hill is a stunner, with aerial views into the 24-kilometre-long Saanich Inlet, the deepest fiord on Vancouver Island's east coast.

You'll stand 438 metres above the water, but getting there is not a major challenge since the Caleb Road parking lot and trailhead are already at a high elevation.

The only challenge is the final ascent to the peak of the open ridge, with its wide-angle views up and down the fiord.

Black bears and cougars have been spotted here occasionally, but since the trail is so popular with hikers and their dogs, large animals tend to avoid it. The route is four kilometres each way, with

lots of ups and downs. Allow about four hours including time to unpack lunch at one of the many scenic overlooks.

**MATHESON LAKE  
REGIONAL PARK  
(28 KILOMETRES  
FROM DOWNTOWN)**

A perfect outing for families, the Matheson Lake Loop is a fairly easy four-kilometre circuit that starts and ends at a sandy swimming beach after you pass large, magical grottoes of giant ferns.

One of my favourite spots for a picnic is atop a grassy cliff on the north side of the lake, at about the three-kilometre mark if going clockwise.

Settle in to one of the natural lounge chairs formed by grass-covered rock and enjoy your lunch with views of the sun-dappled lake and the steep forested walls that enclose it.

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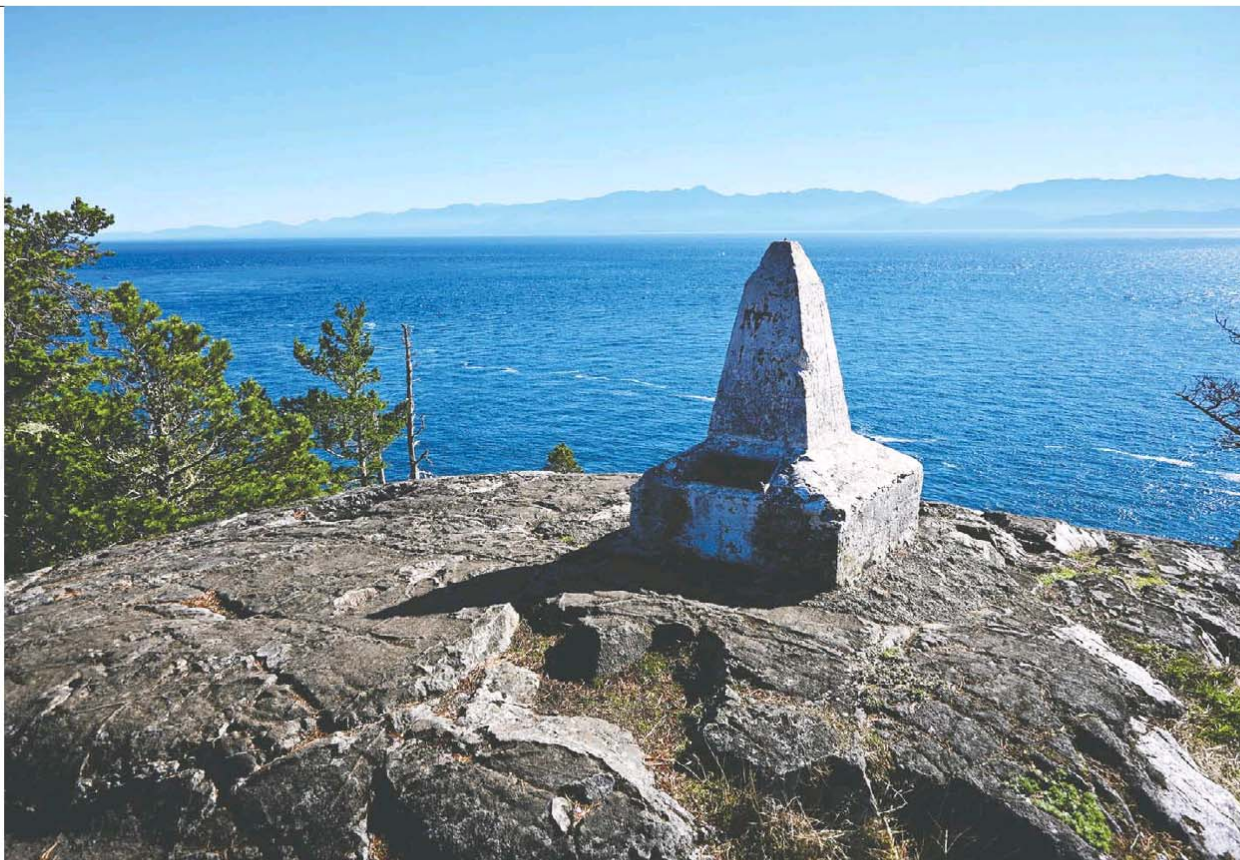
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**EAST SOOKE COAST TRAIL**  
(33.7 KILOMETRES FROM DOWNTOWN)

Fifty kilometres of trails course through the sprawling, rugged East Sooke Provincial Park, but the hero is the 10-km coastal walk. It doesn't sound far, but the terrain is so rugged, with frequent ups and downs over rocks and headlands, that doing the full length can take eight hours. The full one-way journey is one of the most beautiful (and challenging) on the island and requires two cars, one parked at either end.

A popular and pleasant alternative is a six-km round trip from the parking lot at Aylard Farm to Beechey Head. The terrain is less challenging on this section, passing sandy beaches and rocky coves. You'll likely see seals and sea lions near shore and, if you're lucky, orcas further out.

At Alldridge Point, stop for the historic petroglyphs of the Salish people. You'll need a keen eye, as they've been nearly erased by the elements. Don't be fooled by imitations carved by vandals. Beechey Head itself is a looming rock headland with breathtaking views up and down the rugged coast. A cairn marks the spot, and smooth granite warmed by the sun is the perfect place to refuel.



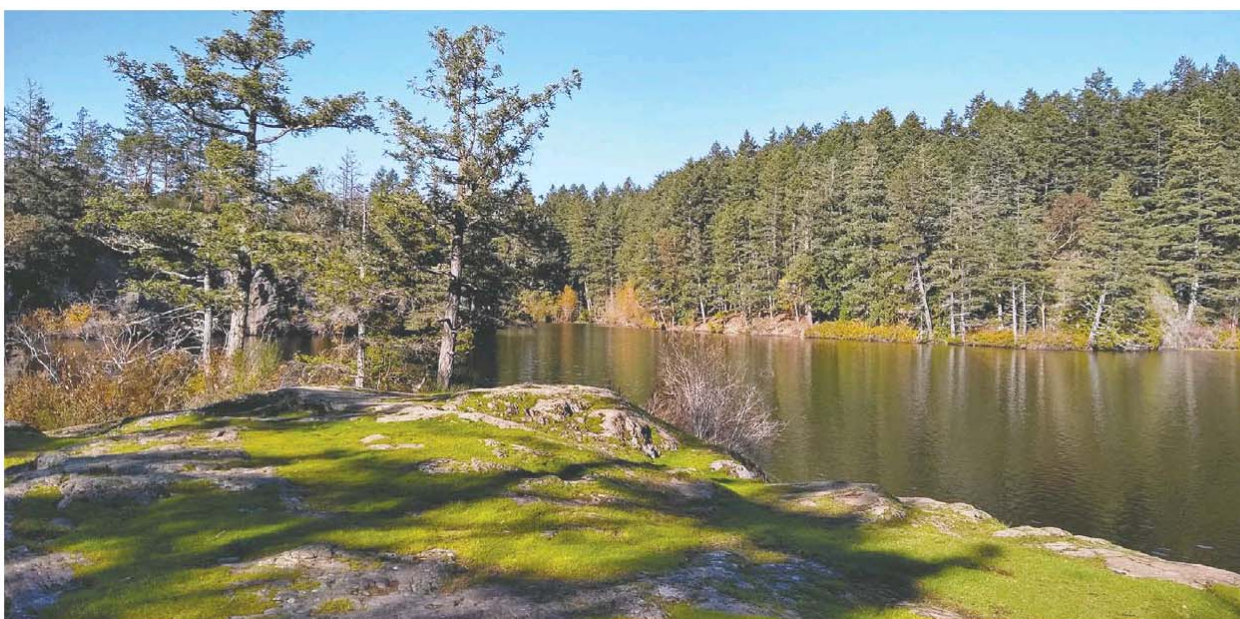
A cairn on Beechey Head marks the turnaround point for a partial hike of the East Sooke Coast Trail. PHOTOS: GLEN PETRIE

**THETIS LAKE REGIONAL PARK**  
(10.2 KILOMETRES FROM DOWNTOWN)

Some of the most pleasant country walks are within the city limits. Thetis Lake Regional Park was established in 1958 as Canada's first nature sanctuary as a hedge against postwar sprawl. The 4.5-km circuit that hugs the perimeter of Thetis Lake, which is like two lakes linked by a narrow channel, is the most popular.

Others venture up into the hills. For the best views, start at the sandy beach, travel counter-clockwise and veer right onto a footpath that climbs Seymour Hill.

In contrast to the main trails, some of the offbeat paths are ill-defined and not well labelled. Friends of mine have seen a cougar here. More than one walker has spent a night lost in the park, even though civilization is minutes away as the raven flies. But that's Victoria: City and wilderness, side by side.



Thetis Lake Regional Park offers hiking on 45 kilometres of trails in a Victoria suburb. It was established in 1958 as Canada's first nature sanctuary.

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