

The Making of a Team on Juan de

by the 11th Richmond Scouts

Sometimes the most difficult challenges can lead to the most satisfying journeys of self-discovery. So it was for Scouts from the 11th Richmond Group (Coquitlam, BC) when they embarked on a seven-day voyage of excitement, beauty and adventure on Vancouver Island's Juan de Fuca Marine Trail. The trail is 47 kilometres long, and stretches along the western shoreline of southern Vancouver Island, from China Beach to Botanical Beach near Port Renfrew.

As the Scouts found their way on the trail, they discovered in themselves a true Scout team. Here is their story:

Day 1: Hiking in the Rain

Our trek began quite ominously at the China Beach trailhead. It was overcast and threatening rain. Of course, once we left the cars, the skies opened up and rain poured down.

Rain gear on, we headed for Mystic Beach and got a taste of west (or is it "wet") coast hiking — roots and rain, mud and hills. The first two kilometres took roughly two hours as we slowly worked on getting our hiking legs.

At Mystic Beach, we found a beautiful campsite. In no time we had our tents up and supper made. At the same time the rain stopped. Time to explore! The tide was out, and we saw unique caves carved into the cliff face. These sights, along with the power of the ocean, waterfalls and

seals in the surf made this place incredibly beautiful.

Augustine: "This is a beautiful campsite. We rushed to get the fly on our tent before it started raining, and we succeeded. Teamwork is sure something we can count on."

Day 2: Mystic Beach to Bear Beach (7.5 km)

The scenery on the trail amazed us: panoramic ocean views, forests, creeks, waterfalls, and beaches. The ups and downs are challenging with lots of stairs that are almost too high to manage. The trail is constructed from natural objects like a fallen tree cut into a staircase or a bridge, and exposed tree roots that create a ladder to climb up and over obstacles.

Everyone maintained a steady pace all day without complaint. Constant chatter, touching on subjects like genetic engineering and world peace, provided an interesting distraction from the physical task at hand.

Jonathan: "Today I was feeling confident. I knew I could make it up the gigantic hills. Eventually we could see the beach from the log stairs; it was really sweet."

Day 3: Bear Beach to China Beach (12 km)

This section of the trail is as difficult as the West Coast Trail. We started with an awkward stroll along the sand and rocks of Bear Beach. The trail moved off the beach on



Starting out at the trailhead.



Taking a brief rest along a boardwalk beside the ocean.

Fuca Marine Trail

upward terrain and never stopped. The scenery was amazing: planks, bridges, ocean views, rock pools, and huge old growth trees. The trail was really tough; our legs burned from climbing and our toes were bruised from going down.

Day 4: China Beach to Sombrio Beach (8 km)

The difficult terrain didn't scare us, because it covered such a short distance. Our guidebook advised that there was one long climb, and then the trail got easier. The term, "long climb" was an understatement. The hill finally ended, but we still had to traverse some very scary sections of trail. These were mostly along high cliff edges, with a 1/2-metre wide trail, and a sheer drop to the rocks below.

Chris: "The hiking was hard, but fun. Lots of deep mud. We were filthy. I'm glad we have succeeded this far, and I can't wait for tomorrow."

By this point the Scouts formed a tightly-knit group, helping, supporting and encouraging each other. Even though the hiking effort was great, they were helpful and courteous, kind and cheerful, and learned to make wise use of their resources.

Torsten: "We had to hike along the beach again, which I didn't really like — not that I had a choice. The hike

was almost as hard as yesterday's, with lots of obstacles. Toward the end of a climb called 'the Big Hill' I was getting tired and thinking we would never get lunch, and that the hill was never going to end. The trail today was hard, but I enjoyed it just the same."

Day 5: Sombrio to Kuitshe Creek

After a trip to explore West Sombrio Beach, we regrouped for the three kilometre trip to Kuitshe Creek. As usual, we were behind schedule; we arrived just before dark.

Torsten: "The hike was not too difficult. We hiked across a boulder field, but that was kind of fun. We played at the beach and everyone went in the water except me. After the beach, the hiking was rather easy."

Day 6: Kuitshe Creek to Payzant Creek

The trail was interesting, with about 1 1/2 kilometres along the reef shelf; the remainder consisted of boardwalks, log bridges and stairs. The reef was a unique experience — sea life mini-worlds contained in the tidal pools, combined with the sheer power of rock and waves. It created a wild feeling of hiking on the edge of the world.

Paolo: "We saw seals sun-bathing on a rock near the ocean. One seal was

TIPS FOR LOADING A BACKPACK

Here's how to load gear into your backpack before setting off on a trip.

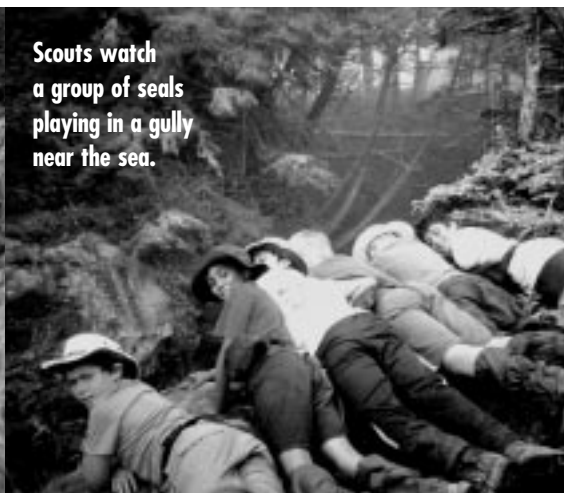
- ✓ Put heavy gear close to your back (see diagram).
- ✓ Medium weight gear should be positioned further from your back, while light or bulky equipment should be rolled and stored outside and below your pack.



really fat and one was really thin. After a few kilometres we saw a seal's head pop up and swim towards us, but it went back down again."



Fog hugged the coast and sometimes limited visibility.



Scouts watch a group of seals playing in a gully near the sea.

Day 7: Payzant Creek to Botanical Beach

This morning we made a side trip to Providence Cove — a beautiful, rugged cove with some very interesting caves that we could actually explore. Then we went to Tom Baird Creek, which was also unique. The remainder of the hike was mostly easy boardwalk through jungle-like forest, with breathtaking views. In high spirits, we climbed the last part of the trail towards the parking lot. The end of the trip was in sight and we eagerly awaited the 47-kilometre marker — the finish. We climbed steadily upwards toward it.

"TIME TO QUIT. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!"

Just because your group plans a trip and spends lots of money to get to an adventure trailhead, doesn't mean you shouldn't call it off if you find conditions have deteriorated to dangerous levels.

The wisest, but often most difficult, decision a leader can make is to "pull the plug" on a trip if the weather turns really nasty or if members aren't prepared. Winter especially is a time for caution. Hypothermia can kill very quickly, but it can also kill in summer, especially if a cold wind is blowing.

Be prepared for the unexpected, but also be prepared to turn back.

FIELDBOOK FOR CANADIAN SCOUTING

Before heading out on a wilderness backpacking trip like the one described above (or any other outdoor adventure), read the *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting*. It is full of tips that will make your expedition more fun and



safer. Interesting topics covered in the book include:

- ✓ Backpack loading tips
- ✓ Sleeping bags
- ✓ First aid treatment
- ✓ Tents
- ✓ Winter camping
- ✓ Equipment checklists
- ✓ Bear bags
- ✓ Flora and fauna
- ✓ Canoeing
- ✓ And much more.

Pick up your copy at a local Scout Shop today.

Late in the day we gathered for a Scout's Own and to discuss what our adventure meant to each of us. We also talked about things we were thankful for. Our leaders awarded badges and a new knife to each of the very deserving Scouts.

Day 8: Payzant Creek to Parkinson Trailhead to Richmond

All good things must come to an end. We all felt a mixture of happiness and sadness, elation and exhaustion with the completion of this incredible hike. It was difficult not to dwell on the hot shower, clean clothing and soft bed ahead, but it was hard to say goodbye to the amazing team members who we have learned to trust and depend on.

The 10-, 11- and 12-year old Scouts did all their own cooking; they set up

and broke camp, and carried all of their gear. They smiled through the most difficult parts of the trail, and were always willing and eager to pose for photographs.

One source of constant amazement to adult leaders was the incredibly intense team spirit that the Scouts demonstrated throughout the hike. All members helped and supported each other through laughter and tears. These young people accomplished something that many people never get to experience. They were challenged, but succeeded. X

— Scouts from the 11th Richmond Group live in Coquitlam, BC.
Photos: Colette Millar.

