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Central Coast

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① Port Hardy

Port Hardy is located within the territory of the Kwakiutl (kaw-gul) First Nations on the northern most tip of Vancouver Island. The territory is the home of the Kwakiult (kwa-gul), the Quatsino (quat-see-know) and the Gwa'sala 'Nakwaxda'xw (gwa-sal-a-nawk-wa dwah) First Nations. Approximately 35% of the local population is indigenous.

The host Nations work closely with the Municipality of Port Hardy to share the costs for services such as fire, animal control, policing, water, and building inspection. Working together they have created a Memorandum of Understanding that supports meaningful relationship building and creates a foundation for future opportunities to build on their partnership.

The BC Ferries Terminal in Port Hardy is located at Bear Cove, the oldest known site of human habitation on Vancouver Island. Europeans first arrived in the area in 1816 when the steamship SS Beaver was sent on an exploratory trip by the Hudson's Bay Company. When coal deposits were discovered in the area, it motivated the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a fortified trading post south of Port Hardy in Beaver Harbour.

The trading post was named "Fort Rupert" after the company's governor, Prince Rupert, Duke of Bavaria. Though little of the fort remains today, the Kwakiutl (kwa-gul) First Nations continue to reside adjacent to the former fort site as they always have.

The Island Highway did not reach the northern community until the spring of 1979 when BC Ferries moved its Vancouver Island Terminal for the inside passage, from Kelsey Bay to Bear Cove.

② God's Pocket

To the west lies God's Pocket Marine Provincial Park, a group of islands located 20 kilometres (or 12.5 miles) north of Port Hardy. Although there are no designated campsites at this park, wilderness camping is allowed at no cost. God's Pocket is located within the traditional territory of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, Kwakiutl, and Tlatlasikwala First Nations.

The bay was named by fishermen who navigated their small boats south through Hecate Strait. They would say, "If we can make it to the safe bay in Christie Pass, then we will surely be in the Pocket of God." This phrase led to the name "God's Pocket" sticking for the area.

God's Pocket Marine Provincial Park offers some of the world's finest cold-water scuba diving, along with opportunities for kayaking, hiking, shore walking, and wildlife viewing, including whale watching.

The focus of the park is habitat protection for wildlife; the park protects a seabird breeding colony and eagles and whales are common in the area. Among Indigenous cultures there are traditional stories and legends that believe the Sasquatch People live on the islands as well.

The word "Sasquatch" is derived from the Halkomelem word "sásq'ets," which is the name of a mythical being that is covered in hair, walks upright, and is believed to have a more powerful and much larger stature than humans. They are also believed to possess advanced spiritual abilities.

The islands in God's Pocket are believed to hold spiritual significance for Indigenous people, reflecting a deep respect for the natural world. It is an enchanting place to visit as seen as sacred and imbued with spiritual energy.

3 Scarlett Point Lighthouse

Located on Balaklava Island at the northwest point of the entrance to Christie passage, Scarlet Point Lighthouse is one of just 27 staffed lighthouses in British Columbia.

First put into operation in 1905, the lighthouse is located about 30 metres (or 100 feet) from the water's edge. The light house stands 27 metres (or about 90 feet) above the high tide line, and it's light can be seen from up to 16 kilometres (or about 10 miles) away.

In 1909 a fog bell was added to Scarlett Point, to provide an audible warning to mariners. This fog bell was replaced just six years later in 1915 by a more powerful diaphone type foghorn that could be heard from a much greater distance.

After 60 years of helping keep mariners safe, the original lighthouse was replaced in 1965. Rebuilt in the same location, the new steel lighthouse features an octagonal lantern room and a new light that emits a white light every five seconds.

Due to the remote location of Scarlett Point Lighthouse, the light keepers need to remain at the station twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

4 Rivers Inlet - Wuikinuxv Nation

Rivers Inlet is also known as the Wuikinuxv (wheekin-au) Nation. The Wuikinuxv people's settlement in Rivers Inlet, particularly Wanukv River, is part of a larger community that includes Calvery Island, Wuikinuxv Lake, and portions of the Koeye Watershed. Population numbers fluctuate from 60 to 200 people throughout the year, with a notable increase during the summer fishing season when community members return home to harvest and preserve salmon for the winter months.

The cyclical way of life for the Wuikinuxv has evolved around hunting, gathering, preserving, and trading. This way of life and cycles of harvesting have been maintained since time immemorial.

A small hatchery facility operated in the area from 1981 to 1994 but then stood idle, until 2016 when the support from private donors, the Wuikinuxv Nation, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and the Department of Fisheries and Ocean's Salmon Enhancement Program re-developed the hatchery to the Percy Walkus Enhancement Facility. The new hatchery has made a significant positive impact on the health of the local salmon.

The commitments to conservation and sustainability have ensured a plentiful supply of salmon for food, social and ceremonial purposes. Additionally, the Wuikinuxv have partnered with sports fishing operations in the territory to provide jobs and other benefits to support the Nation's vision around conservation and sustainability.

The Wuikinuxv Nation collaborated with the Museum of Anthropology at UBC and their Indigenous curator for the museum, to write the sourcebook "We are the Wuikinuxv Nation", providing a glimpse into the lives of the Wuikinuxv Nation through historical Wuikinuxv artwork, archival photographs, contemporary perspectives and photographs.

5 Kvai watershed Qqs Cultural Camp

The Kvai watershed nestled 60 km southeast of Bella Bella in the shared territories of the Heiltsuk and Wuikinuxv people, is a place of cultural significance. In this rich landscape, the Heiltsuk host a cultural summer camp for their youth run by the Qqs Society. The programs at the summer camp embrace the social, cultural, and natural values that have fortified the Heiltsuk people since the time of Creation.

It serves as a vital space for passing down traditions and nurturing a deep connection to the land and heritage. The Qqs society was incorporated in 1999 at the behest of the hereditary chiefs, who directed the founding board to create an organization specifically for Heiltsuk youth and families, aiming to facilitate learning on the land from the land.

The organization has consistently worked to amplify the inherent strengths and leadership within the community—qualities the Heiltsuk people recognize as integral to forging a vibrant and resilient future for the Nation.

The society operates with a three-fold purpose. Firstly, it seeks to educate Heiltsuk youth about the intricacies of their natural environment, fostering an interest in science and resource management careers as well as enhancing self-confidence, communication skills, and cultural knowledge. Secondly, Qqs collaborates with other registered charities and social services agencies to support at-risk youth, extending its impact beyond its immediate community. Lastly, the society endeavors to instill in Heiltsuk youth the skills necessary for the sustainable use of the environment, ensuring a harmonious relationship between the community and the land. This multifaceted approach reflects a commitment to holistic development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship.

The ultimate goal is to uplift an emerging generation of Heiltsuk leaders who are committed to the resurgence of their Heiltsuk culture and to sustainable relationships with our lands and waters

6 Hakai Luxvbalis Conservancy Area

The Hakai Luxvbalis Conservancy, the largest provincial marine protected region in British Columbia, is located 130km (about 80 miles) north of Port Hardy. Its original status as a provincial park was challenged by the Heiltsuk Nation in recognition of the importance of the area as a significant part of the Heiltsuk territory.

As a result, the park designation was removed in 2008 and replaced with a co-partnership between the Heiltsuk Nation and the Province of British Columbia. More recently recognizing the shared territory with the Wuikinuxv people the agreement is now a Tripartite agreement between the two nations and the Province of British Columbia. This collaborative agreement aims to achieve conservation and recreation goals for the area, while ensuring that the Heiltsuk Nation has access to the land and its resources.

The Hakai Luxvbalis Conservancy spans over 120,000 hectares of land and sea, comprised of an archipelago of islands and has no developed facilities although small floating fishing lodges operate seasonally in the Hakai water inlets. Access is limited to sea or air travel, adding to the area's remote appeal.

It is renowned for its scenic coastline features, including lagoons, reversing tidal rapids, and white-sand beaches framed by forested hills. These elements contribute to the area's wilderness beauty and ecological diversity, making it a significant destination for nature enthusiasts with kayaking being one of the most popular activities in the region. This is a special place to the Heiltsuk people who hope that the area will be enjoyed by all who visit.

7 Namu

To the east is Namu, situated on an ancient Heiltsuk village site within the Heiltsuk Territory. The name Namu is the Heiltsuk word for 'whirlwind'. Up until the more recent discovery of Triquet Island village site Namu was the oldest known village site of the Heiltsuk dating back 10,000 plus years.

Sacred burial sites dating back to 3400 BC and shell middens found in Namu align with the oral history of the Heiltsuk people. These shell middens provide an archive of ancient coastal life with each layer recording changes in diet, behavior and activities. This evidence suggests a deep-rooted connection between the Indigenous People of the region and the marine resources that sustained them.

Now a ghost town, Namu was once home to a thriving cannery operation. During the busy summer months, many came to Namu from near and far to make a living. The population would explode to 1500 or more with people coming from as far as Prince Rupert, Kitimat, Klemtu, Bella Bella, Bella Coola and the lower mainland. The community's history is rich with tales of its bustling past, where individuals of Indigenous, White, and Japanese descent labored together in the cannery before returning to their segregated residential areas. The town was once linked by a maze of boardwalks, with buildings built over the water.

In 1997 the Heiltsuk Nation embarked on the repatriation of over 200 human remains that were removed over time by archeologists. The youth of the community made and painted traditional bentwood boxes in which the remains were placed and transported back to their original burial site. It is the belief of many Indigenous People that remains are to be left undisturbed and if disturbed or moved after burial their spirits can be restless and unable to transition and be at peace.

8 Bella Bella

The village of Bella Bella is the home of the Heiltsuk Nation. The Heiltsuk have inhabited their homelands since time immemorial. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Heiltsuk were 10,000 members strong.

Archaeological evidence corroborates over 14,000 years of what is known as their "nu'yem" (new-yim) or oral history of their stories and place. The Heiltsuk Nu'yem even tells how their ancestors survived the Ice Age.

Additionally, the Heiltsuk Nu'yem tells how their ancestors survived the subsequent great floods by moving up onto the two high mountain tops situated at each end of Hunter Island and the mainland.

The location where we will be docking is the original village site called Qlc (Gull-t-s) which is also the original site for the first Hudson's Bay trading post here, known as Fort McLaughlin that was established in 1833.

The Heiltsuk Nation is a progressive and assertive Nation. The population on the reserve ranges between 1500 to 1700. Like many remote communities, the population increases significantly when members return home to visit and work on their winter supply of traditional foods like salmon, seaweed and many other resources from the land and sea.

Today the Heiltsuk membership is more than 3,000 and growing and are the largest indigenous group on the Central Coast of British Columbia. The Heiltsuk believe that their Nu'yem means that no matter where their members live today, they are Heiltsuk and that their long ancestral connection to each other is based on deeply rooted lineages.

9 Shearwater

Shearwater is located three miles from Old Bella Bella on Denny Island in the Great Bear Rainforest. It is in the territory of the Heiltsuk Nation. Shearwater was named after HMS Shearwater, a Royal Navy vessel on BC's coast from 1902 – 1915.

The Heiltsuk have inhabited the central coast since time immemorial, with their traditional territory encompassing over 35,000 square kilometers of inlets, islands, rivers, and mountains. Before European contact, the Heiltsuk people resided in more than 50 villages, including those on Campbell and Denny Islands. Families managed trap lines, harvested and processed salmon, and traded goods with neighboring villages.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Denny Island became a hub for two canneries that processed clams, abalone, and salmon. People from the local community and beyond came to work in these canneries, and a small town with a store and post office emerged to support them.

By 1938, the cannery operations were consolidated into other production centers leading to the dismantling of the Denny Island cannery, to be relocated in Haida Gwaii.

Soon after, the Canadian government established an airstrip on Klik-Tso-Atli Harbour, recognizing its strategic location on Canada's Pacific coast. Klik-Tso-Atli Harbour refers to when you are standing at the head of Shearwater Bay looking northwest it looks like the island is floating. During World War II, this airstrip expanded into a full-sized Royal Canadian Air Force station, complete with aircraft hangars, a hospital, administrative buildings, and accommodations for up to 1,000 people, including Heiltsuk members who served in the war. As the war neared its end, the air force closed the station, relocating troops and aircraft to the Comox base.

From 1941 to 1944, Shearwater operated as an antisubmarine bomber reconnaissance post. Afterward, it was purchased by the Whidsten family, who had settled on the central coast in the late 19th century. They transformed the former RCAF site into a full-service marina and fishing resort.

In 2021, the Heiltsuk Tribal Council invested funds secured through reconciliation agreements to acquire Shearwater Resort and Marina, and related businesses co-located on Denny Island. Through the purchase, the Heiltsuk have regained ownership of an important part of their territory and are unlocking new economic opportunities for their members, incorporating Heiltsuk traditions, stewardship values, and hospitality, becoming an ultimate wilderness and eco-tour destination.

The community of Shearwater has approximately 100 full time residents and growing, and offers a range of amenities, including stores and a small community school. Denny Island is notably powered by renewable energy, with 97 percent of its electricity supplied by the Ocean Falls hydropower facility.

10 Ocean Falls

The community of Ocean Falls is accessible only by air or sea. Ocean Falls is known for its abundance of rain – about 4,500mm (or 177 inches) annually, and is sometimes referred to as the “Land of the Rain People.” The Heiltsuk First Nations people have inhabited the coastal region surrounding Ocean Falls for more than 9,000 years. This has been an important resource site for the Heiltsuk for many generations and is rich in history. The Heiltsuk seasonal village was located at the base of a spectacular waterfall.

In 1906 the first settlers arrived having seen the potential use of the abundant resources and the huge waterfall was destroyed when the lakes were dammed and land cleared for a town site. Ocean Falls then became the home of the largest pulp and paper mill in the province that included members of the Heiltsuk Nation, along with a sizable contingent of Japanese Canadian workers.

The mill opened in 1912, and supported the town with a population of close to 4,000 with its own school system, a hospital, the province's largest hotels at the time, and an Olympic size swimming pool where several known champions trained. However, much of the Ocean Falls towns' history has been lost, as many of the original buildings have fallen into decay since the mill's closure in 1980.

Japanese Canadians in Ocean Falls faced significant discrimination, including being paid less than other workers and required to live in a segregated community. In 1942, the Japanese population suffered the same fate as other Japanese people working in company towns when they were forcibly removed and sent to internment camps in the interior of the province in during the Second World War.

Ocean Falls has a historic cemetery and current work today is being done by community volunteers and local BC Ferries crew to locate missing graves and restore their headstones, some of those being World War I veterans, through continuous fundraising efforts.

Today Ocean Falls consists of a small residential community, along with a few operating business including an Inn and museum. It is a popular stop during the summer for those travelling the Inside Passage.

11 Bella Coola

Nestled in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest lies the Bella Coola Valley, a place of stunning natural beauty and rich cultural history. The Nuxalk people, known collectively as Nuxalkmc, have a deep and long-standing connection to the Bella Coola Valley, with their lineage tracing back to a group of first ancestors sent down from the Creator. This connection spans over 14,000 years, as evidenced by both oral history and archaeological findings.

Europeans first encountered this area in 1793, when Captain Vancouver charted the North Bentinck Arm. Just weeks later, explorer Alexander MacKenzie completed the first overland crossing of North America north of Mexico, arriving in Bella Coola. This year became significant to the Nuxalk people as they became known to the wider world and were introduced to new ideas of trade.

By 1867, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post was established, and Bella Coola quickly became a thriving port and supply center for the interior. However, the period also brought the smallpox epidemic, which devastated the population, significantly reducing the Nuxalk population.

In the 1890s, Norwegian colonists arrived in Bella Coola, becoming the largest non-native group in the area. Together with the Nuxalk, these two populations continued to form the majority of the community through the next century and into the present day.

Bella Coola relied solely on boat and horse travel for transport until the residents donated their time, energy, equipment, and money to construct a road over Heckman Pass.

In 1953, the Freedom Road was completed, allowing overland travel from Bella Coola to Williams Lake and beyond. The spectacular stretch of Highway 20 east of Bella Coola, known locally as The Hill, is 43 km (or 27 miles) of steep, narrow roadway with switchbacks, gaining approximately 1,600 m (or 5,000 ft) in elevation. It is one of the most spectacular drives in British Columbia, connecting the Chilcotin Plateau to the lush Great Bear Rainforest.

The Nuxalk Government is committed to protecting and incorporating Nuxalk culture into their ancestral and current governance structure. Their ancestors used their teachings to create laws and build a complex, resilient, and effective society. They documented their knowledge system so that future generations would continue to learn and practice Nuxalk ways of being in the world.

The entire Bella Coola Valley has a population of about 2,200 people. Tourism, fishing, logging, and public service all contribute significantly to the economy. Bella Coola Harbour is the grand entrance to the Great Bear Rainforest, which comprises sixty-four thousand square kilometers (about twenty-five thousand square miles) and is one of the largest remaining tracts of unspoiled temperate rainforest in the world. Sacred sites featuring totems and petroglyphs stand as testament to the rich historical stories and cultural importance of the Nuxalk territory. Bella Coola is not just a place; it's a community built on resilience, history, and the enduring spirit of its people.

Ka slqw'amknap mats' ca sqiixanap.
Ka yayatwitimutap kamalh ka-laaqws'mnap
uula asikaaxilh t'axw, ska alhk'yukmitsutap c-ti
cmanwasnap. Way!

In your exploration of this land, the Great Bear Rainforest, may you find peace in your inner spirit

For more information on Bella Coola Valley and the Nuxalk Laws <https://nuxalknation.ca/visit-us/>