

# Regional Parks & Trails Guide

breathe



REGIONAL  
DISTRICT  
OF NANAIMO

RECREATION AND PARKS

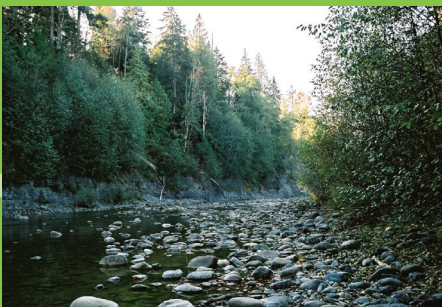
Regional District of Nanaimo  
Recreation and Parks  
**Regional Parks & Trails Guide**  
1 888 828 2069 | 250 248 3252  
[www.rdn.bc.ca](http://www.rdn.bc.ca)

# breathe





# breathe





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# regional parks & trails

## come explore

*a rich diversity of natural and cultural landscapes; exciting outdoor recreational opportunities.*

## share the vision

*significant lands and waters secured; environmental features and values protected; outdoor enjoyment for everyone; trail from park to park; the chance to be inspired by nature.*

## learn

*how precious are our watercourses, estuaries and shorelines; how our woodlands remain home to a vast range of wildlife - big and small; why we must work at co-existing with wildlife; how nature sustains us.*

## and play

*walk, run, cycle, hike, ride, roll, paddle, climb, ski; rewarding outdoor experiences for residents and visitors alike - for the health of it.*

## we can do it together

*It takes a community to make a park system: regional and provincial governments, land and conservation trusts, private landowners, users and individual donors. Our work as stewards continues and your contribution is valued.*





## while you're there

*"Leave only footprints, take only pictures."  
Take your litter away with you when you go;  
stay on designated trails;  
admire but do not cut or damage vegetation.  
Wildlife are wild: leave them alone.*

## remember

NO FIRES except at regional campgrounds.  
See a fire? Call 1 800 663 5555 or \*5555.

NO ATVs, dirt bikes or other unlicensed vehicles.  
Motor noise, fuel emissions and degradation of  
the land don't belong in parks.

DOGS must always be under control.  
Remember to remove your animal's feces.  
Obey all dog-on-leash signs.

No alcohol (except at regional campgrounds),  
firearms or hunting while in parks, or on the trail.

We invite you to get involved, get informed  
and help build this region's growing  
park and trail legacy.

## questions or comments?

CONTACT RDN RECREATION AND PARKS.  
CALL TOLL FREE 1 888 828 2069 OR 250 248 3252  
OR VISIT [WWW.RDN.BC.CA](http://WWW.RDN.BC.CA)

# using this guide

*This third edition of Breathe describes RDN regional parks and trails that are ready for you to see and experience. Use this guide to navigate your way to your next adventure along BC's beautiful west coast.*

*In this 2014 edition of Breathe, check out new material under Moorecroft Regional Park, Lighthouse Country Regional Trail, Parksville-Qualicum Beach Links and Mount Benson Regional Park.*







The nineteen parks and trails in this guide are grouped according to their situation in the northern, central or southern section of the RDN. Refer to the three large overview maps of parks and trails at the back of the guide to see how the parks and trails are dispersed across the Region.



Just want to know where you can go cycling or bird watching? Use the activity matrix at the end of the guide to quickly locate the parks or trails that suit your desired activity for the day.



joy!

# lighthouse country regional trail

Blazed by hard-working volunteers, the Lighthouse Country Trail is in two loops eventually to be connected by a bridge over Nile Creek. The North Loop and adjacent Wildwood Community Park offer over 2 km of easy forested trail suited to walkers and equestrians. Part of the South Loop has been developed with 2.5 km of wheelchair accessible trail featuring bridges, boardwalk, benches, picnic tables, wood carvings, a tapping rail for the visually or balance impaired, accessible parking lot and toilets at each end. The remaining 3 km of South Loop runs through the Wilson Family Woodlot and provides equestrians, walkers and cyclists with access to more trail running up the Nile valley.

## things to do

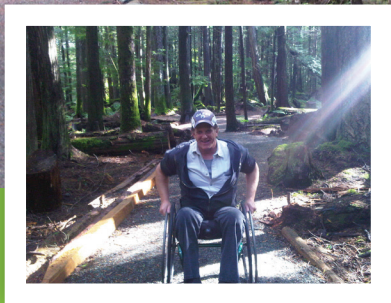
Walking, rolling, running, horseback riding

## how to get there

For the North Loop, go to Wildwood Community Park on McColl Rd in Bowser, one block inland from Hwy 19A. For the South Loop, head to the accessible trailhead parking lot on Lioness Blvd (off Lions Way, off Hwy 19A) in Qualicum Bay.

Overview map on page 46-47





## features

*Wheelchair accessible forest trail,  
toilets, benches, bridges, boardwalk,  
wood carvings.*

# big qualicum river regional trail

This trail starts at the Big Qualicum Hatchery and follows the 10 km-long, gravel hatchery service road the length of the river. Amble along under the riverside tree canopy, explore the Fisheries and Oceans Canada hatchery complex and catch the action when the salmon spawn in the fall. It's a great level route for family cycling groups. Note that the trail ends before Horne Lake Caves Rd, a narrow active logging road unsuitable for walkers and cyclists.

## things to do

Walking, biking, salmon viewing, running

## how to get there

This Regional Trail is located in Qualicum Bay. Parking is available at the Big Qualicum River Salmon Hatchery. (To get to the trailhead follow the hatchery signs off Horne Lake Rd between Hwy 19 and Hwy 19A).

Overview map on page 46-47



## features

*Easy long cycle for families and groups.  
Salmon hatchery with  
interpretation facilities.*



# horne lake regional park

The RDN acquired this, its first campground park, in early 2002. Nestled under Mount Mark at the west end of Horne Lake beside famous Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park, the 105 hectare regional park boasts over five kilometres of lake and riverfront to enjoy and explore. A boat ramp, canoe and kayak rentals along with day-use picnicking area complement the campground's rustic wooded and lakefront sites. A range of programmed recreation and access to year-round guided cave tours next door offer adventures to remember.

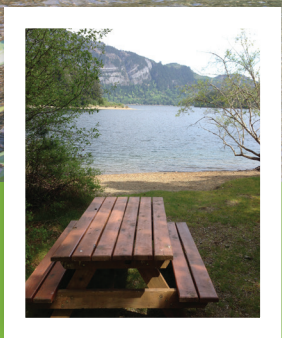
## things to do

Camping, hiking, boating, swimming, picnicking, programmed recreation, fishing, caving

## how to get there

Take the Horne Lake Rd exit (#75) off Hwy 19 and drive inland about five kilometres to the junction with Horne Lake Caves Rd; turn right and follow Horne Lake Caves Rd along the north shore of the lake all the way to the entrance of Horne Lake Regional Park. Note that the gravel Horne Lake Caves Rd is narrow, winding and periodically used by logging trucks.

Overview map on page 46-47



## features

*Waterfront campsites, boat launch,  
programmed recreation, caving,  
mountain views.*

# little qualicum river regional park

Acquired by the RDN in 1999, this 40 hectare park runs along both sides of the Little Qualicum River downstream from Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park. The regional park is largely undeveloped riparian corridor with an upper bench under the hydro lines. The river can be accessed by a private gravel haul road off the end of Corcan Rd. Take caution – this road is steep, narrow, used by gravel trucks, and is subject to weekend and seasonal closures. A parking lot and trail off Meadowood Way provides an easy link between regional and provincial parks.

## things to do

Hiking, fishing, swimming

## how to get there

The Meadowood Way trailhead is reached via Corcan Rd (off Hwy 19A, off Baylis Rd, off Dorman Rd).

Overview map on page 46-47





## features

*Connects to scenic  
Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park.*

# arrowsmith CPR regional trail

The Canadian Pacific Railway built this historic trail in 1912 to service their Cameron Lake resort guests. The views from the forested mountain trail remain spectacular today. The trail winds steadily uphill from Hwy 4 through private forest lands to the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District's park, site of a defunct ski hill. It's a good four hour climb on rough but ready trail to the old ski hill – and network of Mount Cokely trails – with a great lookout about half way. The upper half of the Arrowsmith CPR Trail is a large loop; the entire trail length including the loop is about 10 km, and total elevation gain is about 1000 metres. It's high country so be prepared for changeable weather: pack water, warm clothing and wear sturdy boots. Thanks to Island Timberlands and TimberWest for access to the lands.

## things to do

Hiking

## how to get there

Park at the BC Parks Cameron Lake day-use area located on Hwy 4 at the east end of the lake. Carefully cross Hwy 4 to reach the trailhead.

Overview map on page 46-47



## features

*Stunning views of the  
Beaufort Range and  
McBey Creek Bridge.*



# mount arrowsmith massif regional park

In 2008, and with the help of the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC, the Alpine Club of Canada and the Hupacasath First Nation, the RDN obtained licence from the Province to manage over 1300 hectares of the Mount Arrowsmith massif as park. The summits of both Cokely and Arrowsmith are included in this high country park.

Mount Arrowsmith Massif's alpine meadows are awash with flowers in the late spring and early summer. White tailed Ptarmigan live on the high ridges, and there is historical evidence of the Vancouver Island Marmot having lived in the area. The Arrowsmith snow pack is key to the health of the Englishman and Little Qualicum, both important Vancouver Island salmon rivers and sources of drinking water.

A long-standing network of hiking trails including the Saddle and Judges Routes, allow intermediate and experienced hikers to explore the alpine reaches of Cokely and Arrowsmith. Guided hikes are available through RDN Recreation and Parks ([rdn.bc.ca/recreation](http://rdn.bc.ca/recreation)) to assist novice hikers with the way up. All precautions should be taken when hiking and climbing alpine trails.

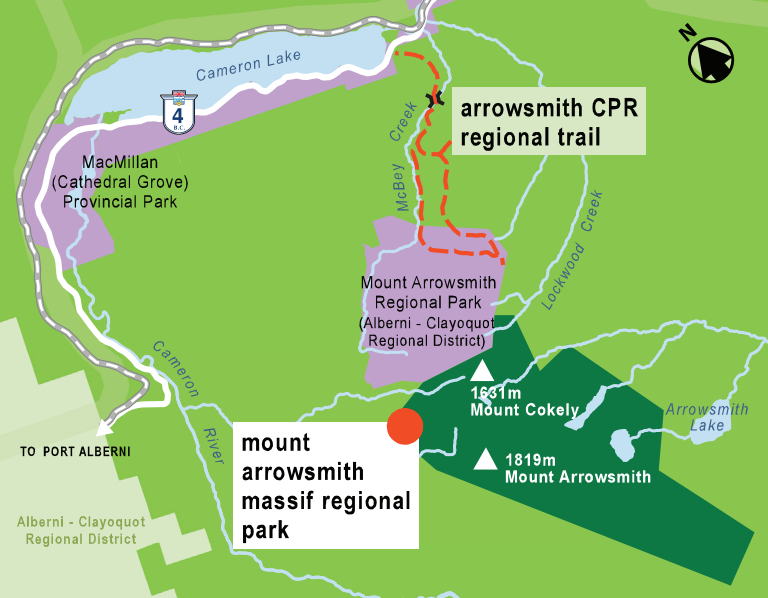
## things to do

Hiking, Nordic skiing, snow shoeing, ice and rock climbing

## how to get there

Generally speaking, it is necessary to drive Island Timberlands' private logging roads in order to get to the Regional Park and its network of alpine trails. Hikers are directed to the company's web site for up-to-date information about road access.

**Overview map on page 46-47**



## features

*High alpine hiking, climbing,  
flora and fauna with  
no end of views.*

# parksville-qualicum beach links

Not in a rush and want to cycle, run or walk between Parksville and Qualicum Beach without having to tangle with Hwy 19A? The P-QB Links is for you. The Links is a low-traffic road route – with a couple of stretches of paved trail – that features an accessible pedestrian-cyclist bridge over French Creek. The route runs from downtown Qualicum Beach to City Hall in Parksville and passes behind Wembley Mall. During the late fall, stand on the Barclay Crescent Bridge and watch the salmon run up French Creek.





## things to do

Cycling, running, walking

## how to get there

Hop on the P-QB Links anywhere along the way. Road signage marks the route and shows you which way to Parksville or Qualicum Beach.

Overview map on page 48-49



# top bridge regional trail

Inaugurated in 1999, the Top Bridge Regional Trail connects Rathtrevor Beach Provincial Park on the Strait of Georgia with the Top Bridge Crossing, a magnificent pedestrian-cyclist suspension bridge spanning the Englishman River at a lively junction of parks and conservation area. The trail is five kilometres in length each way and offers a rustic ramble or bike ride away from the urban sea-side to the cool woodlands of the Englishman River. The mid-section of the trail passes through private property: users are requested to stay on the authorized trail route and respect private property. At Top Bridge, take a break, take a dip or just sit back on the rocks and enjoy the beauty of a famous salmon river.

## things to do

Walking, hiking, swimming, picnicking, mountain biking, running, horseback riding, fishing

## how to get there

Catch the trail at Rathtrevor Beach Provincial Park, anywhere along Resort Drive, at Industrial Way and Tuan Rd (one block inland from Hwy 19A) or at the City of Parksville's Top Bridge Mountain Bike Park (end of Chattell Rd, off Kaye Rd, off Hwy 19A by the truck scales).

Alternatively, go to the end of Allsbrook Rd (off Bellevue Rd, off Hwy 4A) and start at the Top Bridge Crossing.

**Overview map on page 48-49**



## features

*Trail from ocean to river canyon.  
Gateway to more park and trail.*

# englishman river regional park

In 2005, the RDN partnered with The Nature Trust of BC, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Province of BC to acquire this 207 hectare park and conservation area. The park is home to numerous wildlife species including Roosevelt Elk, a community hatchery, and over four kilometres of DFO side channel for salmon rearing and spawning. Wander or ride the many forested park trails and admire the beauty of a great Vancouver Island river. Be sure to visit in the fall when the salmon are moving upstream to spawn. Finished your park adventure? Head off on the Top Bridge Trail to explore the oceanside at Craig Bay.

## things to do

Walking, mountain biking, salmon viewing, fishing, picnicking, nature appreciation, horseback riding

## how to get there

Approach the regional park from the end of paved Allsbrook Rd (off Bellevue Rd, off Hwy 4A) or the end of Middlegate Rd in Errington. You can also reach the park by way of the Top Bridge Trail and Top Bridge Crossing.

**Overview map on page 48-49**





## features

*Salmon hatchery and channel system.  
Long woodland trails.  
Connects to Top Bridge.*

# beachcomber regional park

In 1988, the RDN received the precious one-hectare Beachcomber property from area residents and the region's first regional park was created. Situated at the end of Nanoose's Beachcomber Peninsula, the park offers spectacular views west across Craig Bay to Parksville and Mount Arrowsmith and north across the Strait of Georgia to the mainland coastal mountains. At low tide, large flat rocks are exposed which makes great territory for exploring and tide pool investigating. Away from the sea, enjoy short walking trails through Arbutus, Douglas-fir and Garry Oak woodland.

## things to do

Walking, beach exploring,  
bird watching

## how to get there

Take Northwest Bay Rd (off either Hwy 19 or Hwy 19A) and proceed to Claudet Rd and Marina Way.

**Overview map on page 48-49**



## features

*Ocean and mountain views,  
benches and lots of low tide  
waterfront to explore.*

# moorecroft regional park

In 2011, the RDN purchased Moorecroft Camp in Nanoose from the BC Conference of the United Church. The Nature Trust of BC and the Nanaimo Area Land Trust assisted in fundraising. Long sought after as regional park, this 34-hectare oceanfront property offers exceptional recreational, cultural and natural values. In operation as a camp since the mid-1930s, Moorecroft has been a part of growing up on Vancouver Island for generations of children. Home to precious Garry Oak meadow and Coastal Douglas-fir moist maritime ecosystem, Moorecroft is now protected by conservation covenant held by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, so please keep dogs on leash at all times.

## things to do

Walking, nature appreciation, bird watching, picnicking, swimming

## how to get there

Take Northwest Bay Rd (off either Hwy 19 or Hwy 19A) and proceed to Stewart Rd; follow Stewart Rd to the Park.

**Overview map on page 48-49**





## features

*Extensive oceanfront, tide pools, lagoon.  
Trails and boardwalk.  
Garry Oak meadow.*

# benson creek falls regional park

The RDN has a long-term lease from the Province of BC for this 31 hectare regional park on the western slopes of Mount Benson. Benson and Flynnfall Creeks run down through the regional park thus creating a series of lovely waterfalls. Steep ravines and rough unmaintained trails characterize this heavily wooded park so take care when exploring and avoid degrading the sensitive riparian areas.

## things to do

Hiking (caution is advised, especially on steep, unmaintained trails and when crossing the two main creeks),  
nature appreciation

## how to get there

Use Weigles Rd (off Doumont or Biggs Rds) to reach the park. Roadside parking is located about 400 metres from the Biggs-Doumont intersection.

Overview map on page 50-51



## features

*Waterfalls and mossy rocky ravines for the intrepid hiker.*

# mount benson regional park & witchcraft lake regional trail

In 2006, the RDN partnered with the Nanaimo Area Land Trust to secure this 213 hectare regional park on the north east slopes of Mount Benson. In 2012, the RDN formalized the Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail through City of Nanaimo and Crown woodlot lands as the authorized public access to Mount Benson Regional Park. Views from Mt. Benson are panoramic: look out over Nanaimo to the Strait of Georgia and the mainland beyond or feast your eyes on the peaks of central Vancouver Island's highland mountains. Trails are steep and rough: allow five to seven hours for a return trip.

## things to do

Hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing

## how to get there

Go to the Witchcraft Lake Regional Trail parking area on Benson View Rd (off Kilpatrick Rd, off Jingle Pot Rd, off Hwy 19).

Overview map on page 50-51





## features

*Floating boardwalk across lake.  
Panoramic views.*

# trans canada trail

Building on the hard work of Nanaimo area Trans Canada Trail (TCT) volunteers, the RDN officially opened the first piece of TCT between the City of Nanaimo and the Cowichan Valley Regional District in early 2001. Key links in the still roughly developed backwoods TCT route include the Extension Ridge, Pipeline, White Pine and Haslam Trails. Most of the approximately 21 kilometres of trail is situated on private forest lands, licensed public access to which is greatly appreciated. A dramatic suspension bridge over Haslam Creek was installed in 2002 and a crossing over the Nanaimo River should follow one day.

## things to do

Hiking, mountain biking,  
horseback riding

## how to get there

**Extension Ridge trailhead:** on Harewood Mines Rd, at the end of the City of Nanaimo's Colliery Dam Trail.

**Pipeline trailhead:** in the community of Extension at the end of Bramley Rd beside the Volunteer Fire Department building **or** at Nanaimo River Rd by the two large blue waterline vent pipes.

**White Pine and Haslam trailheads:** at the end of Spruston Rd by McKay Lake **or** off the end of Timberlands Rd (across Hwy 1 from the Nanaimo airport).

Overview map on page 50-51



## features

*Haslam Creek Suspension Bridge.  
Series of backwood hiking trails  
over a range of landscapes  
including The Abyss.*

# nanaimo river regional park

The Land Conservancy of BC concluded the acquisition of this 56 hectare property in 2000 at which time the RDN entered into a long-term lease to manage the lands as regional park and conservation area. The park is one of the few remaining natural forests along the lower reaches of the Nanaimo River and a good example of mature coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem. A developed trail network provides walkers, cyclists, swimmers and nature lovers with lots of room to recreate in the woods and along the river; the south eastern portions of the park are dedicated to wildlife habitat.

## things to do

Walking, nature appreciation, swimming, fishing, salmon viewing, picnicking, biking

## how to get there

Park entrances are located on Fry Rd (off Hwy 1, then Nanaimo River Rd) and Frey Rd (off Hwy 1, to Morden Rd, to Main Rd, to Thatcher Rd, then Emblem Rd).

Overview map on page 50-51







## features

*A riverside to explore with large flat rocks and gravel bars illustrating the dynamic force of the river.*

# morden colliery regional trail

In 1995, the RDN took out a long term licence from the Province of BC to use the old South Wellington rail corridor between Morden Colliery Historic Provincial Park and Hemer Provincial Park. About three of the four kilometres of corridor have been developed into trail, with a gap including the need for a Nanaimo River crossing. A bridge over the River is planned for the mid-term; in the long term, the goal is to see the trail corridor run all the way to the ocean at Boat Harbour.

## things to do

Walking, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding

## how to get there

On the west side of the Nanaimo River, take Morden Rd (off Hwy 1) to the Provincial Park and trailhead; on the east side of the River, take Hemer Rd (off Cedar Rd) to the Provincial Park or get on the trail at the Cedar Plaza trailhead on Cedar Rd next to Village Dr.

**Overview map on page 50-51**





## features

*Historical site with interpretive signage.  
Easy access to downtown Cedar  
and Hemer Provincial Park.*

# descanso bay regional park

The RDN's second regional campground park was acquired in 2002 following a generous donation by the Coastal Community Credit Union. This 16 hectare oceanfront park on beautiful Gabriola Island offers wooded campsites, small boat and kayak launch and day-use areas overlooking three awesome shellfish coves. Explore the seafront, watch the ferry boats go by and enjoy the Nanaimo and Mount Benson panorama. Wooded trails in the regional park connect to a network of great walking and biking trails in Cox Community Park across Taylor Bay Rd.

## things to do

Camping, boating, swimming, picnicking, hiking, beach exploring

## how to get there

Descanso Bay Regional Park is located at 595 Taylor Bay Rd, around the corner from the Gabriola Island ferry terminal.

**Overview map on page 50-51**







## features

*Campground, small boat and kayak launch,  
extensive oceanfront,  
trail connections to more park.*

# coats marsh regional park

In 2008, a long-time Gabriola landowner used the federal eco-gift tax program to help The Nature Trust of BC and the RDN acquire and protect 46 ha of environmentally sensitive wetlands and forest. The southern Gulf Islands have only 1.7 per cent of their land base in wetlands. Coats Marsh Regional Park is the first protected wetland on Gabriola, an under-represented category in the Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory. The balance of the new regional park contains second-growth Douglas-fir forest that will now be able to mature to old growth status together with the 707 Community Park woods next door. A rough trail network within the property lets you explore the sensitive habitat.

## things to do

Nature appreciation, bird watching, walking

## how to get there

Stanley Pl (off Coats Dr, off South Rd).

Overview map on page 50-51



## features

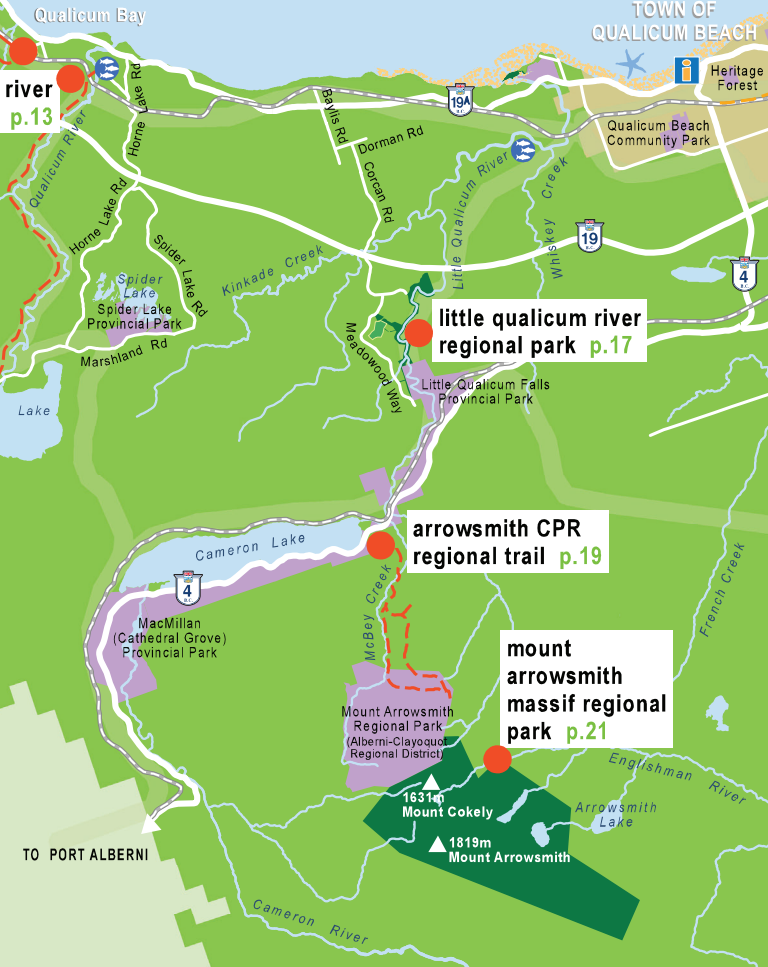
*Quiet marshland, great for  
nature viewing.*

# northern regional parks & trails

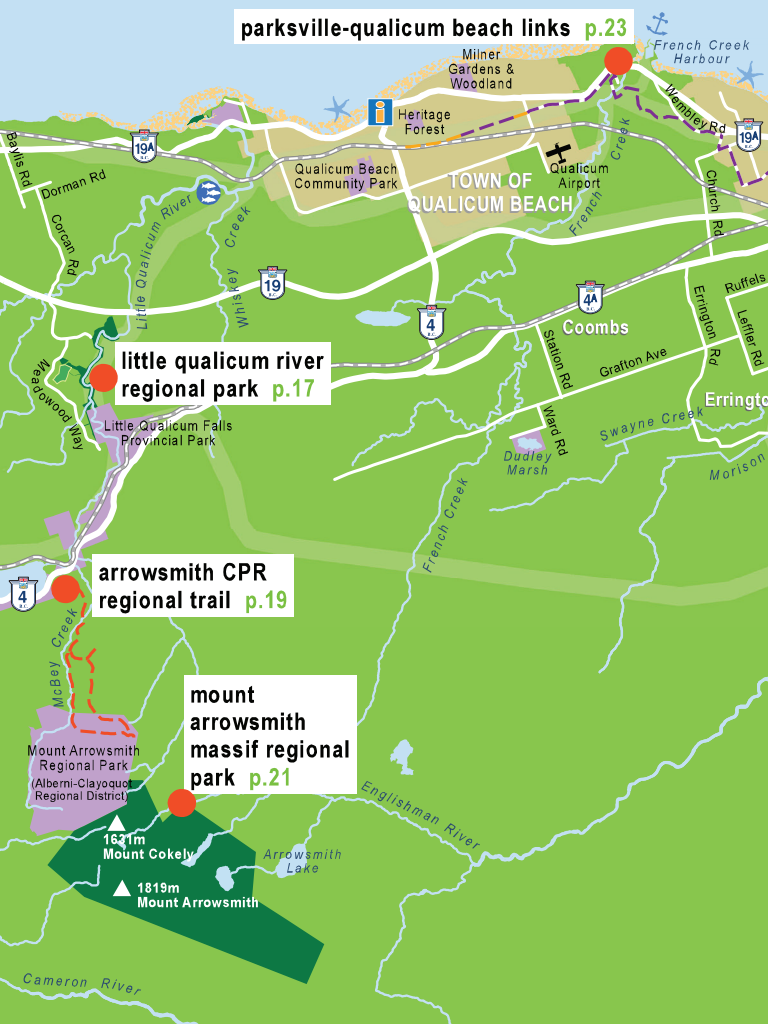




house country  
onal trail p.11



# central regional parks & trails





# southern regional parks & trails









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coats marsh regional park <b>p.44</b>			■			

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Getting active is about more than just burning calories. It's about breathing fresh air and feeling the wind in your face. It's about examining the leaf or flower or puddle that you'd miss if you were driving a car. It's about the sense of wellness that comes from connecting with the natural world. Now, with the help of this Parks and Trails Guide, getting active in the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) has never been so easy.

Here on the east coast of Vancouver Island we live in concert with nature, enjoying our proximity to secluded forests, breathtaking mountain views and endless waterfront. We invite you to breathe deeply, relax and enjoy this guide to the spectacular beauty of our Regional Parks and Trails system.



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*We hope you  
enjoy your Parks  
and Trails Guide  
and find it useful.  
Please pass it  
along to a friend  
when you are done.*

For more information  
please go to our website  
**[www.rdn.bc.ca](http://www.rdn.bc.ca)** or call  
RDN Recreation and Parks  
1 888 828 2069 or  
250 248 3252.

Also go to **[rdn.bc.ca/  
recreation](http://rdn.bc.ca/recreation)** to discover  
outdoor recreation  
activities in your  
regional parks.

*Thank you  
and enjoy the  
outdoors!*

Connect to RDN Parks!



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