

A quick pivot

From holiday disaster to coastal hiking magic.

Niall Davidson, MD, Leigh Trusler, BA, BEd

With an open road ahead of us and a blue sky above, we headed out for a rejuvenating week away from our neurology practice. A road trip, hiking, and restful solitude were exactly what we needed.

On the drive to Vancouver, we kept one eye on the unfolding news of a wildfire burning near Squamish—very close to the area we planned to hike—and the other eye on our falling tire pressure gauge.

The next morning, it was clear we needed our now totally flat tire checked, and the repair shop showed us the large nail lodged in our tire tread. A new tire was ordered and installed, the delay giving us time to do a deep dive into the FireSmoke Canada website, which showed that our hiking destination was covered in a thick pall of Squamish wildfire smoke.

Looking at each other, we considered our options. Since exercising in smoke is not advised, we smiled and headed bravely

for the ferry with no reservations (a debatable move) but our fingers crossed. It was Friday the 13th, but could our luck finally begin to change?

One day and several phone calls later, we found ourselves—backpacks loaded—waiting for a water taxi in Tofino, ready for what was ahead. Our boat driver expertly maneuvered out of the boat launch area, past the crab fishers, and into the open ocean. Salt spray whipped our faces as we raced past emerald-green islands and rocky shores dotted with the occasional beach. We slowed at Flores Island, the beautiful village of Ahousat glittering distantly on the horizon.

After thanking our driver (and reminding him to pick us up in a few days), we stepped onto a white-sand beach and onto the Wild Side Trail. We were hit with the smells of cedar, salt, moss, and cool air, and then, finally, with the quiet.

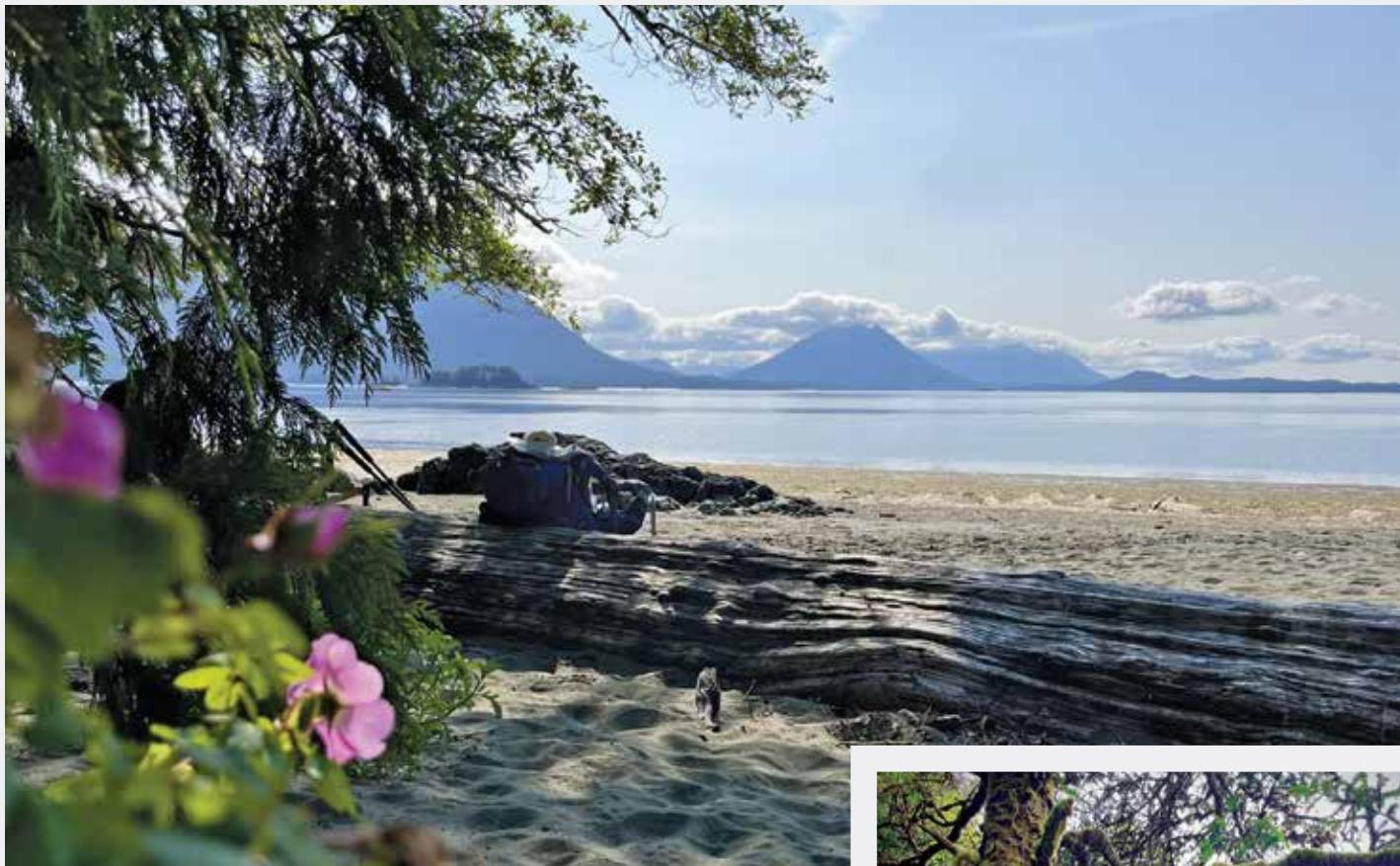
We marveled at the towering cedars and the soft soil under our hiking shoes. The sound of the ocean was never far. Finally, the trail gave way to clusters of salal, sweet-scented wild rose, and stunning Whitesand Cove, where we decided to camp for the night. At the end of our lovely day, some porpoises dipped and dove in the waves in front of our tent site.

There was no fresh water at the campsite. The water source marked on the map had long since dried up. In the morning, we hit the trail with the few litres of water we had left, which, thankfully, were just enough. We soon came to a river and hiked along its banks, tasting the water until we no longer detected salt from the ocean. The water was cool and fresh. We filtered it, filled our bottles, and carried on.

Eventually, the Wild Side Trail led to beautiful Cow Bay, its access marked with colorful buoys hanging in a tree with happy yellow tansies below. Cow Bay's beauty is unparalleled. Imagine a white-sand Caribbean crescent beach with pines instead of palms.

We set up camp and headed to the river—darker, cooler, and even tastier than our previous water stop. Our night was complete with a beautiful sunset. We laughed and reflected on our quick pivot from trip failure to success. The forest fire and the nail in our tire seemed like distant memories. And yes, the water taxi driver remembered to pick us up the next morning. ■

Dr Davidson is a neurologist in the Okanagan Valley. Ms Trusler, Dr Davidson's wife, runs the practice. When not at work, they can be found exploring the beauty BC has to offer, sometimes amid a few obstacles.



The 11 km Wild Side Trail on Flores Island is a rare and beautiful gem worthy of gentle exploration.

Before you go:

- Get your permit and pay the Ahousaht Hahoulthee Access Fee.
- Book your water taxi for drop-off and pickup.
- Take enough water, and ensure you understand where the water sources are.

- Be prepared to be self-sufficient.
- Bring your own toilet paper for the campsite pit toilets.
- Practise leave-no-trace camping and hiking—garbage in, garbage out.