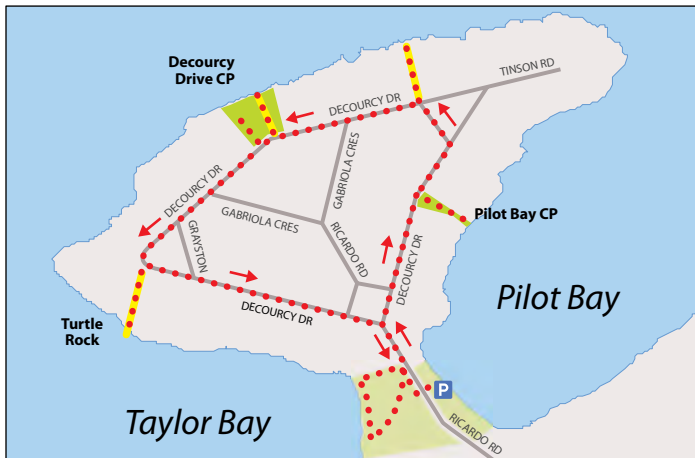


# Walk #5

## Decourcy Views



### What To Expect

*Approx Time:* 45 mins

*Approx Distance:* 2.3 km

*Difficulty:* easy with one short steep hill

*Begin:* parking area at Gabriola Sands Provincial Park

Explore big trees in Gabriola Sands Provincial Park then walk the forested Decourcy loop, visiting viewpoints along the way.

Trailheads are marked with painted rocks (thanks to Gabriola's Grade 6/7 class!) and routes are marked with **green flagging tape**. Both will be removed in late March.

## Trail Route and Tree Nominees



Our walk begins in Gabriola Sands Provincial Park which was the site of a Snuneymuxw village\* called **xwcumi:lucun**. (Sounds like wh tsumiiletsen; the colon indicates that the preceding vowel is held longer than usual). The word means, “close together”, which pertains to the two beaches and was a fishing camp in the early spring to late August where Snunéymuxw people caught spring salmon and bluebacks (coho). It is also home to three trees from GaLTT's **Big Tree Registry** that documents large individuals of each of our 23 native tree species.

Cross the road from the parking area, passing through the yellow gate, and notice the impressive arbutus to the right of the trail. Arbutus trees range along a narrow coastal band from California, north to Quadra Island, primarily within eight kilometres of the ocean. Their honey-scented flowers are important to rufous hummingbirds and bees that drink their nectar. This particular arbutus is in the Big Tree Registry thanks to its nomination by **Rob Brockley**.

Walk toward Taylor Bay for views of Mount Benson and Mount Arrowsmith and admire the huge western

\* Littlefield, Loraine, Coast Salish placenames on Gabriola, *SHALE 2*, pp.21–6, March 2001.



red cedar and Douglas-fir trees above the beach,

each with a multi-branched form typical of open growth trees. When **David Boehm** nominated this cedar for the Big Tree Registry in 2015, and measured its circumference, it was 6.25 metres. It's hard to imagine one near Tofino is three times larger!

Walk back to Ricardo, turn left and walk up the hill. At the intersection with Decourcy, slightly to the right, behind the yield sign and flanked by two young arbutus, you will find Gabriola's largest recorded western yew (also nominated by **David Boehm**) with its reddish bark and trunk stubbled with sprouting flat-needed branchlets. Yew bark was used in cancer research as it yields a key cancer-fighting drug, tamoxifen. The resulting increased demand for yew bark had reached a point of concern until it was possible to synthesize taxol chemically.



Turn right on Decourcy and walk along to the trail for Pilot Bay Community Park, watching for young western hemlock trees along the roadside with characteristic drooping tops. (You'll see a terrific specimen by the entrance to the driveway at 36 Decourcy). Take the park trail to the bench that overlooks Pilot Bay with views to Entrance Island and Howe Sound beyond. As you walk back to the road, notice the woodpecker holes to the right of the trail. The rectangular shaped holes are made by pileated woodpeckers—the largest of our five native species—as they search for insects, primarily ants.

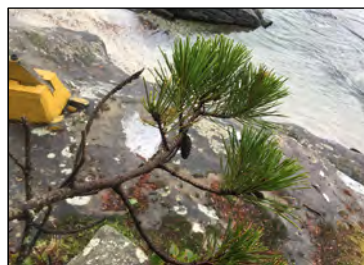
Continue to the right on Decourcy Drive until you reach the road with no name and turn left. Follow this short stretch until you rejoin Decourcy, now on the other side of the peninsula. Immediately in front of you are two wildlife friendly snags with triangular tops left by tree crews as well as a public trail. With about 100 public



shore access points, Gabriola enjoys the most public shore access of any Gulf Island, half of which are developed with trails for all to enjoy. (They are usually marked with yellow concrete blocks).

Stroll left along Decourcy, past Gabriola Crescent, watching for flocks of the golden-crowned kinglets that often feed in the trees along the roadside. Take the shore access marked with a post and recreation trail sign. This is a small community park with 180 degree views to the Sunshine Coast, Texada, Jedediah and Lasqueti islands in the distance and Departure Bay to the west.

A cluster of shore pines grow above the beautiful sandy beach. These highly adaptable trees are tolerant of poor growing conditions such as salt spray. Return to the road and turn right, continuing for 50 meters before turning right down a laneway which ends at the site of the tragic plane crash that killed



three people in December 2019. Local residents and the Regional District of Nanaimo staff planted three trees—a spruce, pine and fir—to commemorate their lost lives.

Continue along Decourcy Drive, admiring the way that local residents have retained the tree canopy and forests of their neighbourhood, helping to maintain ecological diversity. From the beach access to the left of the point, stop to look for turnstones that often feed at "Turtle Rock". Orcas, humpbacks and sea lions are often spotted here. The Decourcy loop will return you to Ricardo and a walk down the hill back to your starting point.

