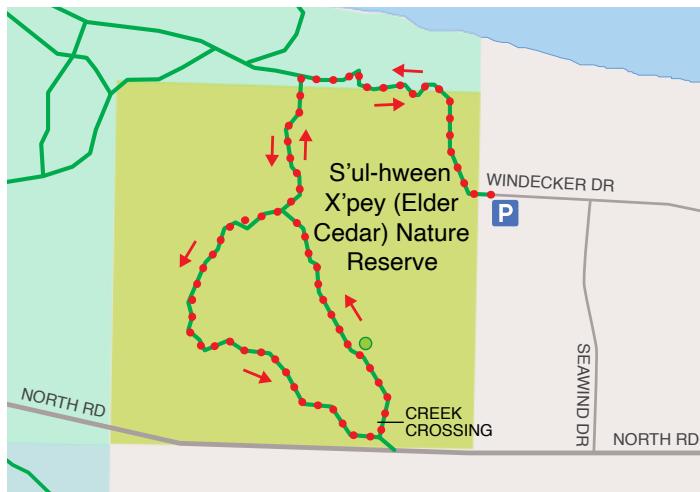


Walk #2

S'ul-hween X'pey Forest Bathing



What To Expect

Approx Time: 1 hr

Approx Distance: 3 km

Difficulty: easy (**WARNING:** rains may raise the creek level above the stepping stones)

Begin: west end of Windecker Drive

Engage your senses as you walk through the magnificent mature forest of the S'ul-hween X'pey (Elder Cedar) loop.

Trail Route



Begin your walk on the S'ul-hween X'pey (Elder Cedar) Nature Reserve trail from the end of Windecker, passing through a grove of small red alder bordered by native Nootka roses where numerous dead snags provide food and shelter for many birds and insects. Snags are dead

trees left upright to decompose. Continue along this forested trail through groves of sword ferns and along boardwalk constructed by GaLTT in 2019, to protect the undergrowth on either side of the seasonally wet trail. At the end of the 90' boardwalk section, you will notice a burned tree, perhaps a reminder of the "big fire" that in 1938 burned for more than three weeks, destroying more than 2,000 acres of forest across Gabriola.

As you follow the trail into the Crown lands held as Treaty settlement lands for the Snuneymuxw First Nation, you will

notice exposed bedrock. Tree roots are pretty good at finding fractures in the bedrock to find moisture/nutrients and anchoring footholds. On Gabriola, that is made much easier because the sandstone bedrock tends to be very fractured. The understory is



2026 Winter Walkabout: Favourite Trees Revisited

* trees were nominated by GaLTT members in 2021

representative of the coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem—Oregon grape, salal, evergreen and red huckleberries all of which bear edible berries in summer.

Red huckleberry



Salal



Oregon grape



Evergreen huckleberry

Leave this main trail and turn left towards the S'ul-hween X'pey (Elder Cedar) Nature Reserve. The Islands Trust, Gabriola's Land Conservancy and numerous residents worked for many years to establish the 160 acre Nature Reserve that was finally designated in 2006. To allow the property to be protected for its ecological and historical values, the Snuneymuxw graciously excluded it from their settlement claim. To recognize the rich First Nations history embedded within the site, the Islands Trust Conservancy with the assistance of Snuneymuxw linguist

and elder Dr. Ellen White, named the Reserve "S'ul-hween X'pey" (download [pronunciation file](#)) which directly translates to "elder cedar". However, this name has a deeper meaning as it possesses connotations of unseen ancestors and guardians. (*Islands Trust Management Plan 2021*).

The reserve is held by the Islands Trust Conservancy (ITC), who have requested that the trails not be marked on the GaLTt map to minimize use.

Cycling and horse riding are not allowed in the reserve and dogs must be leashed to protect the sensitive ecosystem. In 2008 GaLTt was awarded a contract to help manage S'ul-hween X'pey and the protection covenant on S'ul-hween X'pey Nature Reserve is co-held by GaLTt and the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (NALT).

After passing through a cedar grove, and stepping onto the boardwalk, you pass Gabriola's largest Pacific crab apple (nominated by **Susan Brockley**) with its drooping

moss-covered branches. Cages beside the boardwalk once protected restoration plantings of salmonberry, hardhack and other moisture loving plants that are now successfully established where invasive reed canary grass was removed.

At the intersection with the Elder Cedar Loop trail, bear right through the mixed forest with its open canopy and lush undergrowth that gives way to darker forest and lichen covered trees. Lichen is actually two organisms, an algae and fungus living in a mutually beneficial relationship. Look for the small yew tree growing right beside the trail on the left.



A walk through S'ul-hween X'pey reminds us of the value of connecting to the earth. Indigenous people have always been part of the land and an article on the Snuneymuxw website encourages people to spend time in nature, citing the following benefits—boosted immune system, reduced blood pressure and stress and an increase in our sense of happiness. Take time to listen for ravens, smell the rich earth and feel the soft witch's hair lichen as you walk along Stoney Creek and the boardwalks built to protect tree roots. Windblown trees are left to decompose and the opening in the canopy allows cedar seedlings to take hold. As the flow of the creek increases, bigleaf maples appear. This riparian area is ideal habitat for the northern red-legged frog and western toad.

Rather than taking the trail to the parking area, go left and over the stepping stones (if the water is not too high) and along to the elder cedar that is surrounded by a wooden platform to protect its roots from compaction. This area was generally spared from 20th century logging allowing us to appreciate this old mother tree. Follow the trail back to the start of the loop, turn right and retrace your steps to Windecker.

