

Walk #7

Drumbeg Garry Oak Ecosystem



What To Expect

Approx Time: one hour

Approx Distance: 2.5 km return (a figure-eight loop route)

Difficulty: easy to moderate (a few short steep sections with tree roots) - please note that bare rock surfaces and mossy patches along the northeast loop may be slippery

Begin: Drumbeg Provincial Park parking lot off Stalker Road

This walk offers forest and Garry oak meadow trails with lovely shoreline views towards Saturnina, Breakwater and Valdes islands. There are 2 picnic tables and 4 well-situated benches on this walk.

Trail Route

After admiring the view out towards Breakwater and Valdes islands, turn right by the park's picnic tables and follow the trail as it winds its way southwest around the edge of the bay above the shelving sandstone foreshore. Almost immediately, just above the beach's driftwood, you will see two trees—an arbutus and a fir—against each other, with their bases joined. About 200 metres further along, off to the right hand side of the trail, is an unusual arbutus nominated by both **Alison Thomas** and **Traci Zavaglia**. Its twisted trunk grows parallel to the ground, sending up branches vertically. Originally this tree and another arbutus formed an arch; only half remains because the

second tree has now fallen and rolled away, but the live tree still has an interesting hole through the trunk, which can be seen if you walk closer along the short path that leads to it.



The main trail continues to skirt the shore, passing a number of other magnificent arbutus trees, as well as many handsome Garry oaks. It then drops down a short steep slope between the trees. Alternatively, use the upper trail on the right that avoids needing to scale the steep slope. Both eventually meet the end of Stalker Road. This provides access onto a small beach from which one can see boats traveling the narrow channel through Gabriola Passage. Retracing your steps back into the forest, this time take the trail that soon forks off to the left of the one you came on and follow this as it winds uphill between the trees through ferns and salal. This will bring you back to the parking lot to complete the first loop of the walk.

Returning to the picnic tables, start the second loop of the walk by turning left this time and cross the wooden footbridge to follow the trail to the northeast. It is worth stopping at the park display board (close to the public washrooms) to read about the ecology and history of the park (established in 1971 and named after the Scottish home of its former owner, Neil Stalker).

As the path curves around this side of the bay, note another splendid arbutus on the left hand side of the trail. Beyond it and up a short slope there is a bench from which there are good views towards Breakwater Island and beyond, and the path then continues over sometimes slippery bare rock and wet moss towards the northeast. This side of the park is more open, with meadow to one side and open shoreline on the other. Here where there are few trees, an isolated Douglas-fir stands out, nominated by **Alison Thomas**. Its rugged, weathered aspect, and its location above the windswept, rocky beach bring to mind Tom Thomson's iconic Jack Pine painting. A little further along, another "bench with a view" beckons. This one looks towards Saturnina Island, which was recently acquired by BC Parks Foundation to help preserve its sensitive coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem, British Columbia's smallest, rarest and most globally unique biogeoclimatic zone.



The conjoined fir and arbutus

From here the trail turns left, skirting a meadow which GaLTT and BC Parks are in the process of restoring, having cleared it of the Scotch broom that had all but smothered the native vegetation. (Unrestored land beyond the park boundary on the right shows how dominant broom can become.) To promote the regeneration of this area of the park, GaLTT volunteers have been planting oak seedlings (caged to protect them from the deer), as well as native grasses and perennials. These, along with the camas and spring-gold (*Lomatium*) which are now flourishing in this regenerated area, will help return it to its original state as a Garry oak meadow (the Garry oak ecosystem being home to more plant species than any other terrestrial ecosystem in coastal British Columbia). One of the park's several mature Garry oaks is listed in the Big Tree Registry and can be seen across the meadow, to the left of the trail, where it occupies a moss-covered rocky knoll.

The trail soon heads back into the shelter of the forest and walking past the Douglas-fir trees here, it is noticeable how much taller and straighter these trees are than the isolated one standing by the seashore. A short walk back down to the parking lot completes the second loop of this walk.

