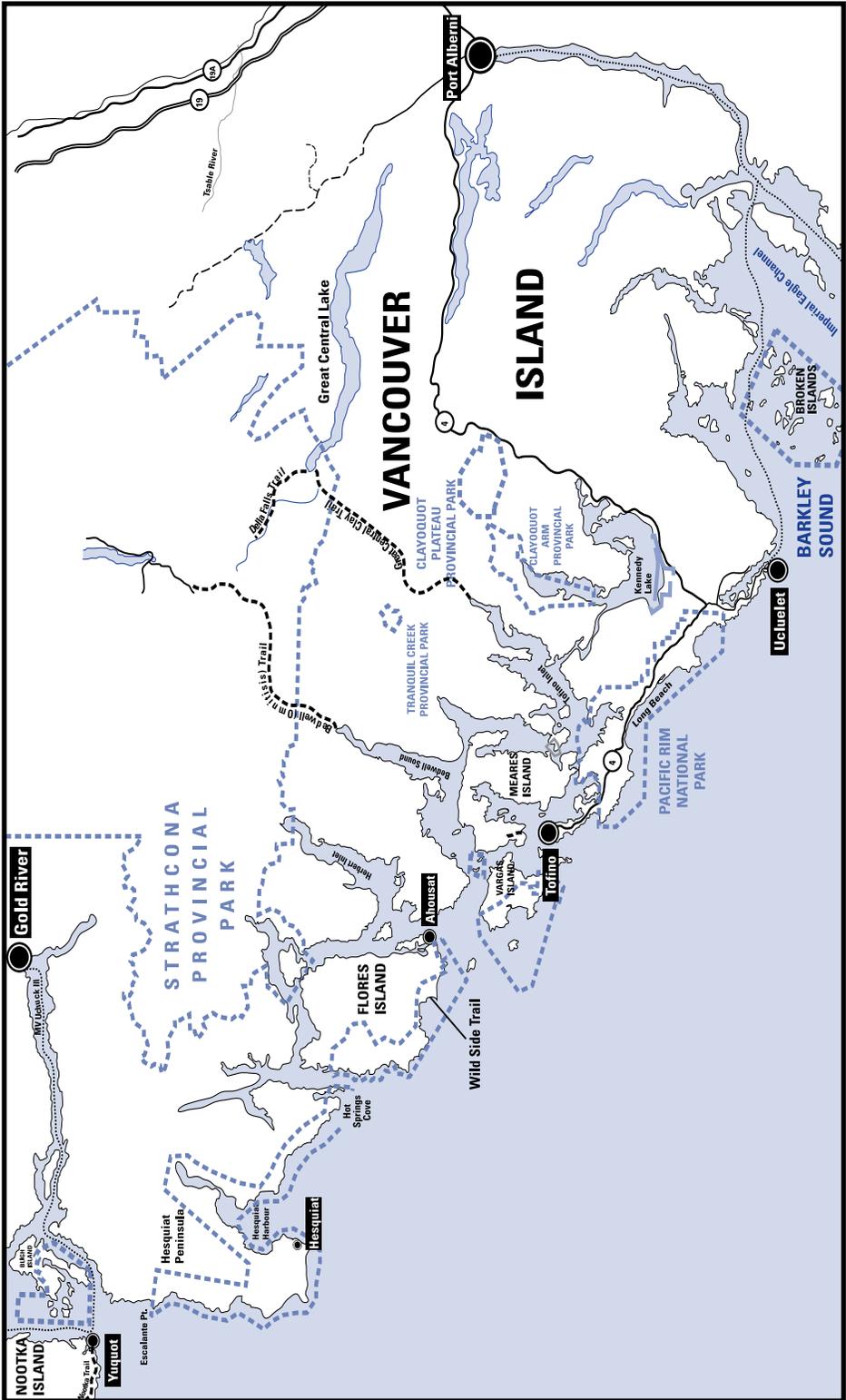


Hesquiat Peninsula

Clayoquot Biosphere's Northern Fringe





Clayoquot Sound Regional Map

Hesquiat Peninsula



Looking north across the beaches at Escalante and Burdwood Point at the entrance to Nootka Sound.

Hesquiat Peninsula

- Vancouver Island

The Hesquiat Peninsula is a west coast promontory of Vancouver Island and divides Clayoquot and Nootka Sounds. The topography of the peninsula is comprised of a low, flat swampy forest rimmed with a stunning shoreline. The shape of the peninsula is square cut with a long stretch of rocky shoreline running north-south from Burdwood Point, at the entrance to Nootka Sound, to the historic lighthouse at Estevan Point. From Estevan Point the coast turns abruptly 90 degrees west-east across to Smokehouse Bay. At the east end of Smokehouse Bay the shore swings another right angle south-north from Matlahaw Point past Hesquiat village and a series of immense beaches to Boat Basin at the head of Hesquiat Harbour.

Much of the land on the Hesquiat Peninsula is now Provincial Park, from Escalante Point all the way around to Hot Springs Cove which is part of Maquinna Marine Park. This region is ancestral home of the Hesquiat First Nation, of the west coast Nuu-chah-nulth people, and there are residents at the tiny outpost of Hesquiat Village.

Points of interest along the route include the beaches at Escalante, Estevan Point lighthouse, Hesquiat Village, beaches around Anton's Spit and Cougar Annie's Garden in Boat Basin.

At the time of writing the Hesquiat trail is one of the least trodden paths along the coast of Vancouver Island, but destined to become one of the most popular.

The name 'Hesquiat' is derived from the Nuu-chah-nulth word 'heish-heish-a', meaning to tear with the teeth. This refers to the technique for stripping off herring spawn from the eel grass around the shore of Hesquiat Village. ¹

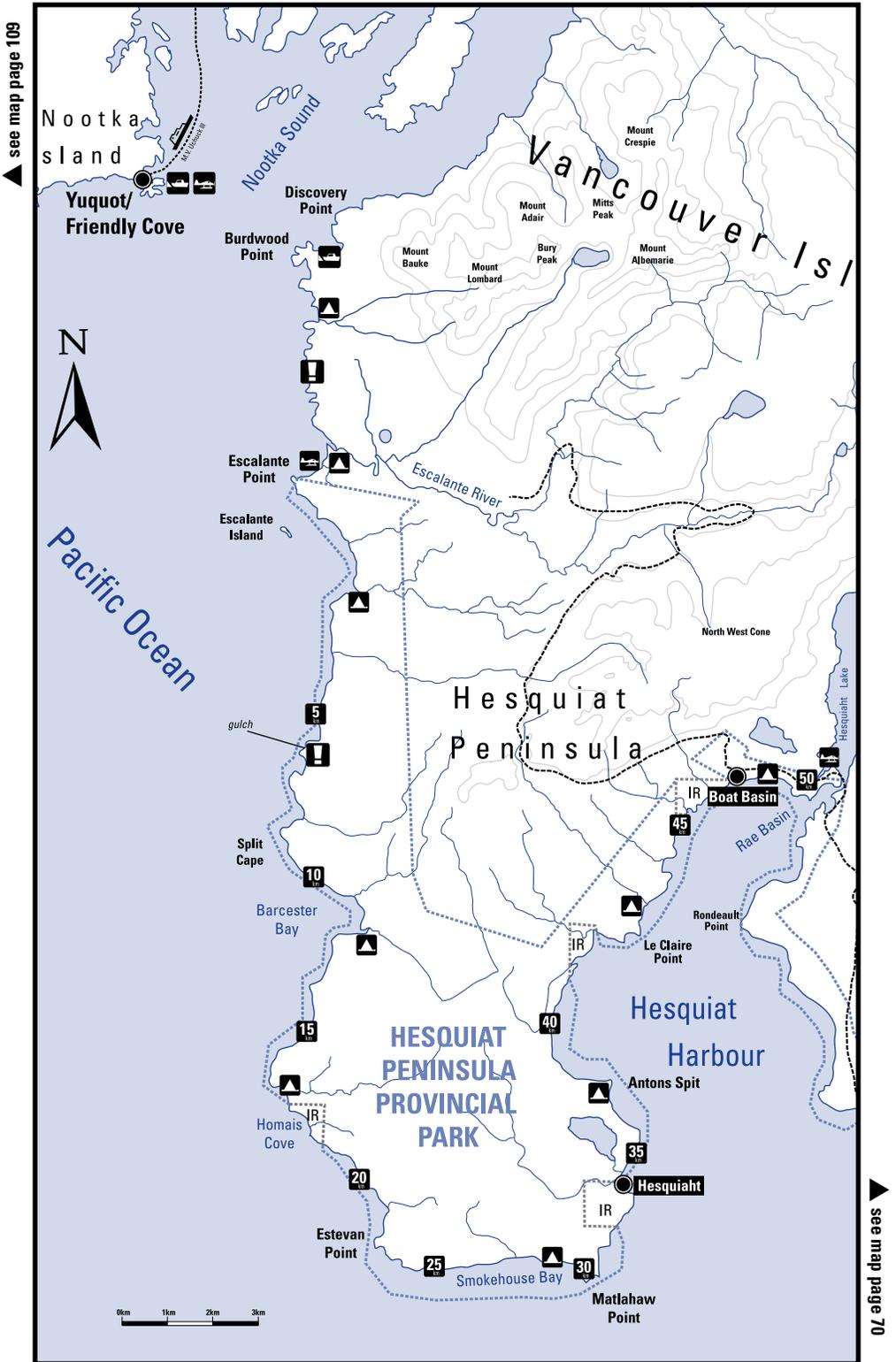
Distance and Duration: 50 km with options, 4-5 days

Rating: Moderate, remote expedition

Permits/Fees: Ask permission before entering the Indian reserve near Hesquiat.

Maps: 92 E07, E08, E09.

Hesquiat Peninsula





Looking north over Escalante Point into Nootka Sound across the landing beach.

Advance Logistics: Flight or water taxi reservations for your group's transport to and from both ends of the trail must be made well in advance to avoid disappointment! Inquiries should be made with the Hesquiat band office to check for current permit requirements and permission.

Trailhead Accommodation: Lions Campground - Gold River

Access and Transportation: The Hesquiat Peninsula trailheads can be reached from either Tofino at the south end or Gold River to the north. The route can be covered in either direction, but the usual direction is to start at Escalante and hike counter-clockwise around to Hesquiat Harbour and Boat Basin.

Escalante can be reached by floatplane from Gold River with Air Nootka and from Tofino with Tofino Air or Atleo River Air Service. Water taxi is also a good and inexpensive way to reach Escalante from Gold River, Friendly Cove or even Tahsis. If your group is up for the challenge of the rugged shoreline between Burdwood and Escalante only a water taxi can be relied on to get you ashore there.

If plans unfold, it may be possible to reach the start of the hike at Escalante with a combination of water taxi/floatplane flight to Hot Springs Cove or Boat Basin and 4x4 drive along logging roads in the Escalante River valley to a proposed spur trail down to the coast.

Air Nootka - <www.airnootka.com> 250-283-2255 • Tofino Air <www.tofinoair.ca> 1-866-486-3247
Maxi's Water Taxi - 250-283-2282

Overview: What sets the Hesquiat Peninsula hike apart from most of the treks described in this book is that almost the entire 50+ km hike is along the shore. There are only a handful of short sections of forest concentrated at either end. There are also very few significant cliffs or other obstacles.

The geology of the shoreline is remarkable throughout, with expansive tidal shale rock shelves, wild sculpted conglomerate and sandstone formations, endless boulder fields and stunning sandy and pebble beaches that run for miles. Another surprise and highlight is the 'inside' coast around Hesquiat Harbour which, because of the flat terrain of the peninsula, still enjoys late afternoon and evening sun. The harbour has an exceptional character due to the unique aspect and exposure to the open Pacific to the south, exemplified by the beaches around Anton's Spit.



Some of the expansive sandstone rock shelves near Escalante. Nootka Island is in the distance.

Route Description: As it is the usual direction of travel, and maybe a bit more aesthetic, the Hesquiat Peninsula hiking route is described counter-clockwise, i.e. from Escalante to Boat Basin.

The prevailing weather and sea state will determine where exactly you are able to be dropped off at Burdwood/Escalante. If arriving by floatplane the beach south of Escalante Island (Little Escalante River) is the most sheltered landing and likely drop off spot. If you are arriving by water taxi and your driver is able to land close to Burdwood Point, take a few minutes to ensure that Escalante River is passable before committing so you avoid getting trapped on its north bank if the tide or river flow is too high. Note that the section of shoreline north of Escalante River is rugged and requires some tricky scrambling and bushwhacking to negotiate. Most parties will want to start their hike on the easier terrain south of Escalante River. The river mouth is tidal requiring a mid or lower tide

and moderate to low river volume to wade. There are gravel bars upstream that may help to make a good route to cross.

Wind and waves may vary immensely on the west coast, but one weather feature that is fairly consistent are the rising afternoon winds, especially from the northwest during periods of fine summer weather. Consequently, there's a good chance your pilot or driver will want to plan a morning flight or boat ride to land you before the afternoon wind picks up. It is well worth planning to spend some time, even a night or two in the Escalante area to explore the many coves, beaches and headlands along the 8 km stretch of shore between Burdwood Point and Escalante Point. The beach at Escalante is one of the most spectacular on this hike and there's lots to explore along with great swimming in the river on hot days.

Camping is straightforward on the wide open sand beaches between Escalante River and 'Little Escalante River', with some protection from either the northwest or southeast winds as needed. There's plenty of year round water here too, so no excuse for starting the hike dehydrated!



Scrambling through the tricky gulch.



Beach at Barcester Bay.

From Little Escalante River the shoreline runs due south, and is comprised of a variety of shallow coves, beaches and extensive shale and sandstone rock shelves. The rock shelf here is exposed at low tide as much as a kilometre from the high water line. The shelf is striated by endless rows of serrated sandstone which align themselves in a north facing nap as if to block hikers heading south.

Just under 6 kilometres from Little Escalante River is the first and only significant obstacle on the whole hike, a narrow gulch that cuts into a small cliff behind a cluster of incredible, spherical sea stacks (see photo left).

Depending on the tide and the sea state, this gulch may be negotiable by scrambling down into it and climbing back up the other side. But take care as the waves rush into this little trap very quickly. If in doubt, take the safer but also exposed route around the rim of the gulch through the bushes.



Sandstone formations south of Barcester Bay.

Hesquiat Peninsula



Estevan Point light station poking above the trees.

Beyond the gulch, the route continues easily weaving over and between the serrated rock formations and along sandy paths at the high water line. One and a half kilometres past the tricky gulch is a cove with more dramatic, sculpted conglomerate rock and a pebble beach just north of Split Cape. There is a creek and camping but it's best to press on to Barcester Bay for the wonderful beach and campsite there. Travel here is easy at low tide on a wide open rock shelf right up to the aptly named Split Cape. You can hop the driftwood right through the split to a change of scenery looking into Barcester Bay. More wide open rock shelf and sand beach leads along the shore into Barcester Beach and excellent camping, a total of 12 kilometres from Little Escalante River (3-4 hours).

Past Barcester Bay the hiking continues to be straightforward. The terrain is mostly a narrow sandy strip of beach at the edge of flat open rock shelf. The coast forms two long but shallow cut bays that lead out to a point at the south end of a black sand beach 4.5 kilometres south of Barcester Bay campsite.

There are still more interesting rock formations here, notably a field of small sandstone domes you can hop from one to another and, out from the forest edge some distance, there are some larger stacks including a beehive-shaped stack. Watch for eagles perched on their tops.

Around the next point there is a sheltered beach with a year round creek and excellent camping at 18 km. From this creek on, running water is scarce so be advised to carry sufficient water to get you to Purdon Creek and Hesquiaht Village. There is a cabin in this cove that may be used in an emergency only or by permission from Peter at Boat Basin Farm (PO Box 753, Tofino, BC, V0R 2Z0, Boat Basin 98076). The Homais Indian Reserve at Homais Cove should be crossed respectfully and no camping is allowed in the reserve. Offshore, the noise of a sea lion rookery adds to the music of the ocean.



Camp at the grassy spit west of Smokehouse Bay.



View from Smokehouse Bay across Hesquiat Harbour to Hot Springs Cove and Flores Island.

A wide boulder strewn rock shelf forms the shore between Homais Cove and the next prominent landmark at the southwest tip of the peninsula, Estevan Point and light station. There is a small creek approximately one kilometre north of the light station. You may have to dig around in the driftwood or even hike back into the forest to find running water in this creek during the summer. All along the shore, just in from the forest's edge, the remains of an old narrow gauge rail system that connected Estevan lighthouse to a lighting depot in Homais Cove can be found.

This is one of the most exposed sections of Vancouver Island's west coast and it can be particularly stormy here during foul weather. There is limited, sheltered, bad weather camping between Estevan Point and past Matlahaw Point, so keep an eye out for opportunities to get into the forest if bad weather threatens. In fair weather, however, the options are plentiful although running water is very scarce. There is an old plank road connecting the light station and Hesquiat Village that was used to bring in building materials and supplies to the station. There are plans to reopen this old road as a hiking trail. If this materializes, it will offer a bad weather alternative to the beach along this section of the hike.

A wide rock shelf covered in countless rocks, from smaller ankle rollers to boulders, wraps around Estevan Point and all the way across the south end of the Hesquiat Peninsula to Smokehouse Bay. There is a beautiful but exposed campsite behind a low, dune grass-covered spit at 29 km at the west side of Smokehouse Bay. The two small creeks marked on the map at 28 km are seasonal and can't be counted on in summer, if in fact they are there at all!

There are some seeps at 30 km at the east end of Smokehouse Bay where there is good camping on the sand beach above the high tideline. Above the beach, in the forest, a campsite has been cleared and there is a pool for collecting water that runs clear for much of the year.



Hesquiat Village.

Hesquiat Peninsula



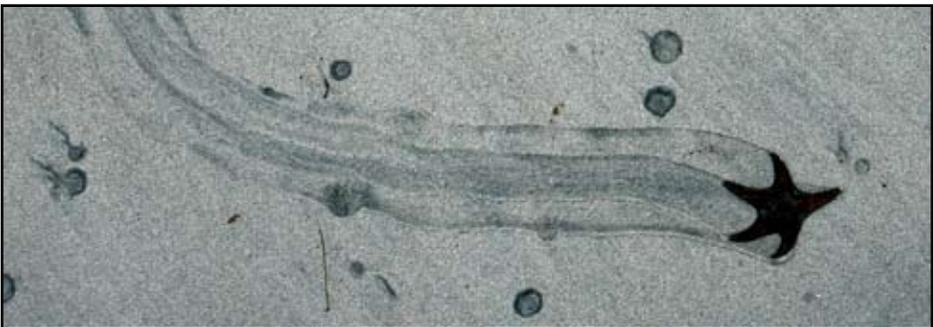
Anton's Spit, Hesquiat Harbour.

The boulder strewn beach continues around Matlahaw Point from where the coastline of the peninsula turns dramatically north into Hesquiat Harbour. An area of wide open sand dunes and dune grass at 32 km, just south of Hesquiat Village has good camping but still there is little, if any, running water here.

Rounding Hesquiat Point (33 km) the coast begins to feel a little less exposed but no less beautiful than the outer coast. Here is the Hesquiaht First Nation Village nestled in the sheltered cove at Purdon Creek. Some contact with the residents here will be a welcome courtesy and even prior permission may become a requirement to cross the reserve. For a small fee camping is available up on the beautiful meadow above the beach. Purdon Creek presents a possibly impassable obstacle at high river flow and/or high tide at the shore but there is a bridge inland on the reserve.

The hiking from the village all the way to Le Claire Point across over 10 kilometres of open beach is one of the highlights of the whole expedition. As you'll be used to now, there is little running water, the dry stretch is between Purdon Creek and the creek at the Teahmit Reserve. Conveniently the most scenic campsite is at Anton's Spit (36.5 km), approximately halfway between the two creeks! You will want to camp at Anton's Spit. The vantage at the entrance to Hesquiat Harbour is stunning and you'll be surprised by the setting sun over the low peninsula, especially at the height of summer.

The sweeping crescent beach north of Anton's Spit can be crossed faster by a more direct line to Le Claire Point at low tide. The usual etiquette should be followed when crossing the Teahmit reserve on the way to Le Claire Point. At the north end of the beach (42.5 km), hike up onto the small rocky cliffs and follow them around on a conglomerate and shale shelf past some interesting toadstool rock formations and past Le Claire Point to a fine pebble beach at 43 km. There is a creek here and the beach is an exquisite place to camp.



Hikers aren't the only ones making tracks on the coast!



Cougar Annie's Garden.

At this point the shoreline route becomes too rugged to follow and an inland route cuts through the forest 600 m past some short cliffs to another beautiful small cove. A second shorter inland trail cuts across the next small headland, then it's back onto open beach covered in grass and small ankle-roller rocks. At 45.5 km is a creek at the south boundary of the Maahpe Reserve. Although camping is possible adjacent to the reserve it would be respectful to avoid camping near the reserve, and observe the usual protocol as you cross it.

It's a straightforward trudge on the last stretch to Boat Basin. There's a short road off the beach at 48 km beside Peter's house which joins the Escalante Main logging road. If you arrive at Boat Basin late and need a place to camp there is a clear running creek and good campsite to the east of where the road meets the beach. The beach route to the east is rugged and not recommended. Instead, go up the road off the beach to the junction with the Escalante Main, turn right and walk eastward down the main logging road past Cougar Annie's Garden.

Cougar Annie was a pioneer immigrant settler who came to Hesquiat Harbour in 1915. Along with four husbands she outlived, Ada Annie Rae-Arthur hacked a homestead out of 5 acres of west coast forest. She built a nursery business and ran a post office, amongst other ventures, until she died in 1985. Access to the garden is limited. Inquire in advance or locally, about admission and you may be in luck.

Past Cougar Annie's Garden continue following the logging road eastward down to Hesquiat Lake. Just before the major bridge over the outlet of the lake, a trail leads down on the west side of the lake to a new dock where the floatplane lands to pick you up.

Additional Info: Cougar Annie's Garden by Margaret Horsfield ISBN 0-9697008-1-4.

Web: <www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/hesqpen.html> <www.clubtread.com> <www.boatbasin.org>



Aerial view of Anton's Spit (R) Village Lake, Hesquiaht Village and Smokehouse Bay.