



Caves & Coves

Tough Tour

June 1st to Sept 30th

1350 km (840 mi.) / 19,300 m (63,320 ft.)

OVERVIEW

Vancouver Island is an amazing place to ride. Whether it is the amazing vistas, the abundant wildlife, or the quiet roads, there are few places like this worthy of getting lost for a while on a bicycle. The rugged, remote portions of the north Island contain the best of the best for the rugged bikepacker to experience these natural wonders found within the KWAKWAKA'WAKW First Nations region. The Caves & Coves Tough Tour has been developed to provide bike-packers with a large route that visits a number of these great places, whether it be at your leisure or the entire route as a bikepacking race for those ready to challenge themselves, or chase a course record.

Which option you choose is completely up to you and your legs.

LOGISTICS: DRIVING or FLYING?

Logistics are always an issue when racing in a new location, or if you are a worldly traveler flying in from abroad.

DRIVING? If you have a local connection where you can leave your vehicle this would be best (for safety), however, you can pay for long-term parking at the Comox Airport. They have a paved lot at \$98/wk or gravel for \$70/wk. Full information [HERE](#).

FLYING? Comox Airport (YQQ) has scheduled flights to/from Vancouver (YVR), Victoria (YYJ), Calgary (YYC), and Edmonton (YEG). However, surprisingly there are a number of international flights that land in Comox as the airport also services Canadian Forces Base Comox (home of 19 Wing Comox)

RESUPPLY & DISTANCES

The larger towns along the east side of the island have full services, however, once past Campbell River, small towns and villages **DO NOT** have anything 24hr. Some do not have full grocery stores at all. Your planning will be key. The largest distance between “any” resupply is upwards of 200km and occurs in the latter part of the route. Read the route guide carefully, and plan accordingly. POI icons on the RWGPS route contain hours for services (to the best of my ability). Fees have also been mentioned for camping in some areas. Remember to bring cash, as some of these remote locations may not have debit or internet.

BE PREPARED: Do your research and planning accordingly.

RACE CATEGORIES:

- Men, Women, and Gender Diverse
- Special records for those riding single-speed or tandem bikes.

RACE FORMAT & RULES:

- OPEN FKT - with no Grand Depart (similar to Baja Divide)
- Ride the route (as designed), from start to finish
- Route is open to ride between June 1st ~ Sept 30 (*Schoen Lake Prov Park access closes Oct 1st*)
- Self-supported, self-reliant bikepacking race rules (no outside aid), however....
- Relaxed rules for riding with friends/pairs, etc. You must start/finish as a group, and photos must include ALL of your group.
- Register for the race as individuals, but you can use one GPS tracker if you want (see below)
- TrackLeaders GPS tracking is recommended. (\$25US) — Dot-Watchers are good mojo, and I can find you on the route too.
 - If riding as a pair or small group and you use TrackLeaders, create your profile using multiple names or call yourself a team... have fun with it! It is not required that every person have GPS tracking... But best if you're going for a record.
- Complete the required (23) photos along the way. Turn on location geotagging for best results.
- Earn up to 17 hrs of time credits by doing (8) extra photo assignments.
- **Submit your photos** for verification to: ride@cavesandcoves.com
- FKT records will require the rider's personal GPS track for verification (ie, Strava, RWGPS, Kamoot, etc)
- Your finishing date/time will be recorded forever on the Internet.
- *Riding this course in “segments” over the summer does not count as an official race finish.*

WHAT'S WITH THE PHOTOS?

THE REASON:

This route was created to highlight many of the amazing places to see on North Vancouver Island. By requiring riders to stop at select locations, the hope is that everyone, even elite racers will stop to look around and “*smell the flowers.*”

I know that not all photos will be taken during daylight hours if riders are “racing” the route. As such it would be ideal if all photos are geo-tagged by using a cell phone, or a camera that has GPS capabilities. However, this is not a requirement.

Mandatory photos need to be “selfies” with some identifying feature (usually a sign) behind yourself. In the dark, this may be a challenge, but do your best, use your flash. (Hence why geo-tagging is so helpful).

There are a couple of notable photo locations you will pass by twice and can be taken in either direction. It is entirely at your discretion and may be influenced by time of day or current weather. Take this into account with your planning.

BONUS TIME CREDITS:

These extra photos are generally at the end of a short detour or walk to a special place, like a cave, waterfall, or beach. A few of these locations are truly amazing settings to camp, and to encourage riders to take a break. One location actually will provide handsome 6-hour time credit which can be increased to 8hrs if you prove you went for a swim!

Riders competing for an FKT could play this to their advantage picking which ones to complete or say, sleep 4hrs at a spot that gives them a 6hr bonus. Math can be fun too.

A WORD ABOUT WATER

- In general, water is very abundant on the island, but drought conditions can dry up small streams..
- Clear, fast-flowing streams are present at all times of the year, however, some creeks do dry up.
- Filtering is always recommended.
- Some streams may be difficult to access due to steep rocky banks.
- The majority of the suggested camping spots along this route are by lakes or creeks, where you can filter water, however...
- Ocean beach sites have little/no access to fresh water, be prepared and bring ample water by filling up where you can.
- In the case of ocean camping, I usually consult my maps and start looking for water sources 10km away from my intended camping spot and ensure that I fill all bottles I have on hand.

REMOTENESS *(a cautionary word):*

When we venture into the middle of the wilderness, we do so knowing the risks. We can be rewarded by watching eagles soaring but can also startle predatory wildlife such as bears, cougars, deer, and elk with our silently moving bicycles. Or we can be caught off guard by a loaded logging truck coming around any corner. Let's not fool ourselves, wilderness bikepacking adventures come with their own dangers. **Never let your guard down.** North of Campbell River there are no cycling shops as you may expect. Excluding Port McNeil & Port Hardy, all towns/villages have limited supplies. By embarking on this route, in whole or in part, you assume all the risks associated with this. **Much of this route is completely out of cell service.** *It is highly recommended to be using a personal beacon when riding in such remote areas. Lithium Batteries may be difficult to find along the route. Ensure you have adequate batteries for the time you expect (and more).*

DISCLAIMER

The information presented here is only a planning resource. It is the rider's responsibility to All efforts have been made to ensure GPS tracks are accurate and up to date, however, they can not be guaranteed. Caves and Coves creator, Salty Beard Bikepacking is in no way liable for personal injury, death, damage to personal property, or any other such situation that might happen to individual riders cycling when following this route. It is the responsibility of each cyclist to ensure they have done all their research and planning required to embark on such a challenging route in remote locations to ensure their personal safety and the safety of others. Medical help is far away and we strongly suggest the use of a personal emergency beacon. In many areas, vehicle traffic will be very scarce. Campbell River is your last stop for any serious bike shop. Ensure your bike is in top working condition and know how to fix minor repairs. Please follow the rules of the road, ride sensibly, and yield to industrial traffic, this is their workplace. Enquire locally if you are unsure about seasonal fire bans. RESPECT THE LAND & LEAVE NO TRACE.

ROAD CONDITIONS / WEATHER

The weather on the north island can be fickle and ever-changing from week to week, and year to year. From rain and high winds to heat and dust. You are the best judge of what you need but be prepared for just about anything. Vancouver Island logging roads tend to be very rocky, or "boney" as we call it, with many sharp rocks that help the large logging trucks with traction in the winter. This wreaks havoc on cars and even more so on bicycle tires. You have been warned. Many of our roads have short, sharp climbs, but this also translates into unsuspecting steep descents around any corner. Combine this with the rough roads and tire-swallowing potholes can lead to disaster.

Check For Updated Logging Road Conditions/Closures here: <https://www.wfproadinfo.com/>

**** HAVE A SOLID NAVIGATION PLAN ** HAVE FOUL WEATHER PLAN ** RIDE WITHIN YOU ABILITIES ****

SIMPLIFIED RESUPPLY DISTANCES (from start)

000 km	—> Comox	FULL
065 km	—> Campbell River	FULL
170 km	—> Gold River	LIMITED
118 km	—> Woss	LACKING
137 km	—> Port Alice	LACKING
073 km	—> Port Hardy	FULL
050 km	—> Holberg	LACKING
068 km	—> Winter Harbour	LACKING
053 km	—> Holberg	LACKING
Off-route	—> Coal Harbour	* ZERO *
094 km	—> Port McNeill	LIMITED
034 km	—> Telegraph Cove	LACKING
064 km	—> Woss	LACKING
193 km	—> Sayward Junction	LIMITED
Off-route	—> Sayward	* ZERO *
184 km	—> Campbell River	FULL
061 km	—> Comox	FULL

FULL: Typical grocery stores, restaurants, accommodation, AND at least ONE gas station that is 24hrs.

LIMITED: Typical grocery stores, restaurants, and accommodation, but gas stations are NOT 24hrs.

LACKING: Only a few places to buy groceries/food at limited hours which could be inconsistent.

***ZERO*:** Just as it means... there is no food services.

TRACKLEADERS

Both for accuracy, and dot watercress, please register your SPOT or InReach with Trackleaders. (Fee \$25 USD). The active link can be found near the top of the main race webpage and will be emailed to registrants Mid-May every year.

GROUPS: It's up to you how many riders carry GPS trackers, however, only one of you really need to be on TrackLeaders if you want you dot to be followed... create a profile using multiple names or give your group a team name. Have fun with it.

DISTANCE GUIDE / ROUTE GUIDE

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
0	0	* COMOX *	Large city, typical services, many bike shops
65	65	* CAMPBELL RIVER *	Large city, typical services, last real bike shop (Swicked Cycles)
122	57	Fire Warden Cabin	IF HE IS AROUND: The fire warden is a pretty cool guy with great stories. He enjoys visitors and has guest book. His hand-built cabin is full of antiques and photos. He's happy to put the coffee on for you. Worth the detour if you want some local flavour.
164	42	New road not on maps	A new road can make it confusing here, follow the downhill flow (the GPS track)... stay straight dropping down onto main road. The old road is no longer there.
177	13	White River Prov. Park	BONUS 1 HR: Three defiant loggers put their jobs on the line to save a stand of old-growth from the sawmill. Keep an eye out for the Old Growth Sign at a small road on your right. Take a selfie with these big trees that are over 285 ft tall. https://ancientforestalliance.org/photos-media/white-river-provincial-park/
243	66	* GOLD RIVER *	Small town, minimal services. Grocery store permanently closed. Small Deli, Fields (canned goods), a few restaurants, accommodation, gas station with food open 7-10 daily. Campground is off route.
255	12	Upana Caves	PHOTO: This is known to be Vancouver Island most predominant publicly accessible caves. Take you time to enjoy the self-guided tour on the various cave entrances. Take a selfie at any of these caves
352	97	* WOSS *	Very small logging town. Small gas station/store ONLY place for food. 7am-8pm. The restaurant across from the store has had revolving owners. It may be open or closed.
353	1	Woss Heritage site	PHOTO: Woss was the last place on the island that still operated logging trains. Selfie with the train.
388	35	Little Huson Caves	PHOTO: Selfie with sign to prove you were here.

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
388	0	Little Huson Caves	BONUS 1 HR: Walk down to one of the most unique caves on the island. Atluck Creek flows from Huson Lake into the large cave entrance. Depending on the water levels, you can enter the large amphitheatre opening without getting wet. The water-carved rock formations are quite something to see. Take a selfie down at the “river cave” - <i>CAUTION: not recommended to access at night, easy to slip or get off trail.</i>
449	61	Devil’s Bath	PHOTO: Canada’s largest Cenote: Selfie with sign to prove you were here. It’s 44m deep, 400m around. The water is connected to the Benson River 200m away, through a cave system 80m below the water table.
455	6	Eternal Fountain	PHOTO: This is all known as a geological “swallet” where a stream reappears as waterfall and immediately disappears into another cave entrance. Known to have life-preserving properties (wink wink) Take a selfie with the sign, and check out this rarely seen geo-formation.
476	21	Alice Falls	PHOTO: this is a seldom visited set of waterfalls, perfect for a lunch stop. Take a selfie at the falls.
476	0	Alice Falls	BONUS 1 HR: At the base of the falls is an impressive swimming hole. Are you brave enough? Capture a selfie in the water up to your neck.... Oh, yeah, don’t just wash your feet. Go for a REAL swim. Coffee is only 12km away if you need a bribe.
489	13	* PORT ALICE *	Small town. Foggy Mountain Coffee (6am-3pm most days, closed Sunday), Family Grocery Store 10am-6pm daily, (Sunday 12pm-6pm)
552	63	Fort Rupert Trail	This historical trail was used by First Nations people when crossing from Fort Rupert to Hardy Bay. It’s a fun ride, but you MUST TAKE CAUTION , if you dare to ride this at night . <u>A boardwalk that skirts along a boggy lake (it has swallowed a few bikes).</u>
561	9	* PORT HARDY *	Small town, typical services. Save On Foods (8am to 9pm). The Chevron Gas station is 24hrs with above average food items.
561	0	Rotary Park	PHOTO: Selfie with a totem pole (right behind the rotary park sign).
577	16	Shoe Tree	PHOTO: Selfie with at the “Shoe Tree” In 1989 Holberg resident Tracey Anon tossed a pair of shoes up into the tree, and now hundreds of shoes adorn the tree.

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
588	11	Nahwitti River Prov. Park	BONUS 1 HR: If you care for a break to stretch the legs, and walk through the some old growth Sitka Spruce (an iconic Vancouver Island tree). Prove you were there with a selfie with these large trees.
594	6	Crushed Car	PHOTO: You can't miss this harsh reminder to always expect the unexpected. Take a selfie with the car.
609	15	* HOLBERG *	Small logging town rich with history. (No Cell Service) Stop into <u>Holberg Pit Stop</u> general store just on the way into town and chat with Marc the owner. If you need a good rest (call ahead from Port Hardy 250- 288-3637 or 604-751-0822 and ask Marc about the rooms for rent at \$130/eve. Tell him your racing the Caves & Coves for a discount). Hours may fluctuate. <u>Scarlet Ibis Pub</u> also has adventure huts \$85/night (250-288-3386). Pub hours: (3pm-8pm Mon-Thr), 1pm-10pm Friday, 1pm-8pm Weekends).
610	1	Old site of float camp	PHOTO: Holberg was the site of the largest floating settlement in the world, housing over 250 loggers, ride .5km along the old pilings and imagine inlet a sea of roofs. Many of the towns current building were just pulled off the water and slid onto foundations. The Pub is built with a few of the old floating houses. Take a selfie at the end under the boat dock sign. OPTION: <i>You can take this photo now, or on the way back at about 656km.</i>
625	15	Ronning's Garden	BONUS 2 HR: Norwegian settler Bernt Ronning, started these gardens in 1910 by writing people from all around the world to send seeds, and created a 5 acre botanical anomaly in the area. It became a regular stop for anyone traveling through. Running died in 1063 and the gardens was almost completely reclaimed by the forest until it was purchased and recovered. Take a photo of yourself within the stand of bamboo located east of Ronning's old house site, but you will need to visit https://ronningsgarden.ca/ and download the Garden Trail to find the bamboo. Please consider donating to help the volunteers maintain the gardens. OPTION: <i>you will be passing by here again, and could take the photo on the way back.</i>
630	5	San Josef Bay (trailhead)	PHOTO: Selfie with one of the trailhead signs. Cape Scott Prov. Park covers the northern tip of Vancouver Island. Read up on the park's fascinating history of reoccurring pioneer settlements. This area is the jewel of the north island. Camping is available here at two different locations outside the park, or down on the beach. Can be busy in summer.

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
630	0	San Josef Bay (beach)	BONUS 3 HR: You've ride almost 1/2 way to get to this one spot. Don't cut this short and turn around here - take the time to check out the beach.... NOTE: you are not allowed to "ride" your bike on the trail to the beach and must walk your bike the 2.5km, but it's a pleasant easy walk. Take a selfie with the iconic sea stack rocks 1/2 way down the beach, in the background and get a robust 2 hr time credit. You can even camp on the shores (\$10)... https://bcparks.ca/cape-scott-park/
667	37	* WINTER HARBOUR *	PHOTO: Selfie with OUTPOST store sign in background. This small remote fishing villages typical of the north Island. Some are accessed down long logging roads, and some are only accessed by boat. Mostly supported by sport fishing now, services are typical of that. <u>The OUTPOST</u> store is the only service in town and only open 2-6pm daily. Showers/bathroom are available on the dock below the store 24/7 (showers take \$1 coins). Kwaksistah Regional Park Campground is currently a no fee as there is no caretaker, and no running fresh water. You must pack out your own garbage. However, I'm hoping that riders will camp at Grant Bay which is coming up in 18 km.
685	18	Grant Bay	PHOTO: Selfie with the trail-head sign at Grant Bay. I urge people to head to the beach, which is 100% rideable with a little skill and only .6km long.
685	0	Grant Bay	BONUS 6 HR: Grant Bay has been described as the "tropical beach of the north" large sandy beach and very clear green water. I have provided a generous 6-hour time credit to entice riders to camp here. The elusive washroom location is about 100ft before the beach on a small trail to the west. The bathroom is a sunken plastic contraption with no protection from the elements or privacy. Might be wise to sing while using the facilities. Take a selfie with your camp setup to prove you were there camping.
685	0	Grand Bay (swimming)	BONUS 2 HR: OH yeah.... And the swimming? It's amazing. Provide photo proof that you went swimming and get ANOTHER 2 hrs for a total of 8 hr credit. This should make stoping at Grant Bay a must do on your list.
715	30	!! CAUTION !!	Take care coming down this hill, not only is it rough, but it drops down to a very active log dump. When passing through this work zone, please be aware of the rules. There is a cable boom that unloads trucks and drops logs into the water. On the back of the machine is a red flashing light. <u>DO NOT PROCEED if the red light is flashing.</u> It's only a 5-10 min wait while they are unloaded. Be very careful between here and Holberg (the next 5km)

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
720	5	* HOLBERG *	You will pass through Holberg again. There are no food supply/services any more in Coal Harbour 40km from Holberg. It will be 100km from Holberg to the next resupply in Port McNeill.
729	9	Goodspeed Fossil Bed	PHOTO: Selfie with your new pet rock “Shelly” that you will easily find at the Goodspeed Fossil Bed. After a 7km climb out of Holberg, you will be turning south onto Northeast Main Logging road, and only a few dozen meters past that junction you will turn again, following the signs up the hill to the fossils. It’s a stiff but manageable 2km climb to the fossil-pit. The views are also pretty enjoyable.
815	86	World’s Largest Burl	PHOTO: When you cross the highway take a photo with a very large burl that was found in 1976. It’s a bit misleading as a <i>larger</i> burl was discovered in 2005, measuring 20ft in diameter, and <i>now</i> is the Worlds Largest Burl , and was located at the ball diamond parking lot. Unfortunately the largest burl suffered fire damage in 2023 and has since been removed for repair. OPTION: <i>you will pass by both this burl again, so if you’re starving for food and coffee, you can take the photo later.</i>
816	1	* PORT MCNEILL *	Slightly larger than Port Hardy, you will find typical services. The IGA grocery store is open 8am-8pm. Also the good Devil’s Bath Brewhouse, Archipelagos Bistro. TAKE NOTE: for those riding through the night, the Petro-Can gas station up the hill is NOT 24hrs, and <i>only</i> open 5am to 10pm. You should be well stocked leaving town, as all your next supply points during the next 490km will have limited hours. Planning could be key.
850	34	* TELEGRAPH COVE *	PHOTO: Telegraph cove is a historical small fishing harbour named as it was the end of the telegraph line that ran up the the island. Now a small kichy tourist spot, boasting a couple of small cafe’s, small general store, and shops, but is known for its Killer Whale Interpretative Centre and the first-ever whale-watching company (Prince of Whales). Public restrooms (& showers) are near the main parking lot. Take a selfie amongst the iconic quaint boardwalk shops.
913	63	* WOSS *	Stock up if you need something, because your next resupply is almost 200km away. If need something it would be wise to swing into the gas station now (open 7am-8pm)
938	25	Schoen Lake Prov. Park	PHOTO: Take a selfie down at the beach with the incredible Mt Schoen in the background. Vancouver Island disputed tallest waterfall is on the back of this mountain. Kiwi Fall is said to be over 1600 ft high. NOTE: This Provincial Park closes Oct 1st. Recent road repair in the park has made the 13km stretch a wee bit rough in places.

KM Dist.	Dist to	Destination	Notes:
957	19	Mount Cain (base)	PHOTO: Take a selfie at the ticket both. Congratulations! You did it... the crux climb, and highest point on this race. Take a breather, and enjoy the view of the surrounding mountains. <i>Here is a great documentary about the volunteer run ski hill</i> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEKPI1brVHs&t=16s
967	10	!! CAUTION !!	Take care: it's a long way down to the highway on a rough road.
1012	45	Naka Creek Beach/Falls	PHOTO: Take a selfie on the beach or at the waterfalls
1059	47	Rooney Ck. / Adam R.	TOP YOUR WATER - this is the last guaranteed water before the 15km Kim Creek climb.
1106	94	* SAYWARD JNCT. *	At this highway crossroads you will find a Co-Op Food Mart, Co-Op Gas station (6am to 10pm), Crossroads Restaurant / Pub (great breakfasts considering they are only open 11am to 7pm. Sayward Fisherboy RV just down the road also has groceries, however, hours are variable. NEXT supply is about 190km. NOTE: <i>The Village of Sayward 10 km north has NO services for travellers (aside from a few RV campgrounds).</i>
1292	186	Elk River Falls	PHOTO: Imagine being on a suspension bridge over a slot canyon watching a 25m waterfall plunge beneath your feet. Take a selfie from the suspension bridge or from the viewing platforms. NOTE: <i>please walk your bike once down on the trails. Do not take it across the suspension bridge. Those who are racing for an FKT may be at this location at night. For safety reasons, I suggest you take your selfie at the steps of the suspension bridge.... The rest is up to you. (Personally I have been on the suspension bridge under a full moon... a bit freaky but cool)</i>
1300	8	* CAMPBELL RIVER *	Back to a large town with the usual service. But you're almost done!! Depending on the time of day, Breakfast at Ideal Cafe, or a beer at Beach Fire Brewing Co, and check out their wall of bike wheels. Or Nesbitt's for coffee & cheesecake, maybe even a stop a Perks Doughnuts? The options are endless. Need a little bike love, stop into Swicked Cycles on 14th Ave, the staff are always happy to help.
1309	9	"Drift" the Driftwood Whale	PHOTO: a recent addition to Sea Walk Interpretive Centre project, this 30ft Humpback While created by Drifted Creations is quite spectacular. Take a selfie with the whale named "Drift"
1360	51	* FINISH *	PHOTO: Yeah, you made it... remember to take a final selfie with the airplanes. Again, chances are the gates will be closed, so just do you best to document your success at completing the challenging Caves & Coves Tough Tour.