

# CGG30 Unit 4: Tourism and the Environment

## Activity 5: Tourist Impacts on the Natural Environment in Canada

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### Overview

As stewards of our environment, it is up to each of us to take care of our natural tourist sites. In this Activity, you will examine the Canadian sites where the detrimental impact of tourism is starting to become obvious.

### Lesson



Canada's National Parks attract millions of visitors each year and the numbers keep growing. They cater to both summer and winter activities and also to a wide spectrum of age groups. Whether you are 2 or 82, there's something for you to see and do. It is important to balance the needs of many stakeholders in the use of Canada's National Parks. The government, tourists, local inhabitants, tour operators and other businesses all have a stake, but they all have different needs and ideas about how parks should be used. However, it is key to maintaining a balance and ensuring there's a

benefit for all. Otherwise, we seek losing the very thing that attracts people in the first place.



Pacific Rim National Park is one of Canada's most popular National Parks. It is small by National Park standards at only 517 square kilometres. However, it boasts over 561 000 visitors per year (B.C. government). In the park, you can engage in all sorts of popular activities that include: camping, canoeing, cycling, diving, fishing, hiking, surfing, and whale watching. However, one of the most popular attractions is its' world famous West Coast Trail which is in Canada's list top 20 hikes and is arguably in the world's 10 best hikes. The hike is 75

kilometers long and takes an average of 5 to 7 days, depending on how experienced you are and how fast you want to go. You can begin the trail at either the North end in Bamfield or the South end at Port Renfrew. Most are strongly encouraged to begin at the South end which is far more difficult. It is better to do what is difficult first, before your back is aching from a traditionally 60 pound pack. The trail becomes much easier on the last two to three days.

The trail was originally constructed for the rescue of mariners that were shipwrecked off the extremely treacherous west coast of Vancouver Island. Shipwreck survivors would follow the difficult trail in either direction and find shelter in wooden cabins that used to be constructed along the route. The trail largely follows an old telegraph route that was first created in 1890, and follows a rugged shoreline where at least 66 ships have met their demise along this stretch, often referred to as the "Graveyard of the Pacific" (B.C. government).

The West Coast trail is world-renowned and you back pack along sandstone cliffs, caves, sea arches, gorgeous waterfalls and along beaches. When you are in the forest you walk through one of North America's most beautiful and rich temperate rainforests. The park is home to mammals, birds, reptiles, fish species and amphibians.



The West Coast Trail is regarded by most experienced hikers as difficult and is not recommended for children under the age of 12. The trail consists of slippery conditions on muddy trails, lots of boulders, rocky shorelines, hundreds of ladders and hundreds of boardwalks.

Hikers need to be prepared for at least 5-7 days in the backcountry. One should be prepared to wade rivers, negotiate steep slopes, earth, climb ladders and use cable cars to pull themselves over swollen rivers. They must also be prepared to not receive any emergency help for about 24 hours. One must also be experienced in reading tide charts which tell you when you can access the shoreline and walk along the beach and when to stay in the forest during high tide. This author has seen people trapped and huddled on small rocks for hours,

waiting for the tides to recede.

### ***Advantages from The West Coast Trail***

1. The West Coast Trail benefits tourists as over 9000 people a year go to hike and enjoy the beauty. The photos speak volumes to diversity of the ecosystem and all that this natural environment has to offer.
2. There are also multiple spin-offs for the communities that surround the Trail. Specifically, Port Renfrew and Bamfield benefit immensely from the existence of this trail. They operate by having hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, resorts and marinas, campsites, commercial operators, transportation services, and restaurants that all cater to the tourists that hike the trail. In fact, in recent surveys conducted about 90% of people in the communities said the trail was a positive benefit for them because it increased the number of visitors to their town, increased the use of existing facilities, attracted new business and visitors from different regions, created additional infrastructures to service trail users. The trail visitors add \$865 000 dollars in economic benefits to the region. This is an incredible and positive, economic benefit (Synergy Management Group Limited).
3. One could also say that the Park System benefits because the land remains protected which is of long-term benefit for all ecosystems. However, there have also been a number of problems that have cropped up within the park over the last decade.

### ***Detrimental Impacts on the West Coast Trail***

1. Overpopulation: The numbers of visitors has increased so dramatically that they have now instituted a reservation system. It used to be that any number of people could begin the trail from either end on any day. They began the reservation system with allowing 30 to start from each end and they have now reduced the number to 26. You must reserve during peak season which runs from June 15th to Sept 15th. The fee has also increased where one must pay a \$108.95 backpacking country fee as well as a \$25.00 reservation fee. Moreover, you must pay \$30.00 to cross the river at Gordon and Nitinat. (B.C. Government) Increased fees tend to deter people that are not really interested in a pristine experience.

2. **Pollution:** Sewage and gum have been large problems in the past. When this author originally hiked the trail in 1990 they came upon massive amounts of sewage and toilet paper behind several trees in the temperate rainforest. There was also a lot of gum on the trail that does not biodegrade and is also a potentially deadly hazard for any wildlife or bird that swallows it. Parks Canada has alleviated the sewage problem by installing “treasure chests” or naturally composting boxes at the campsites so the sewage is less of a concern than it used to be.
3. **Cougars and other wild Animals:** The West Coast Trail is nestled in the heart of Cougar territory. Between 2001 and 2002 there were 3 attacks to humans on Vancouver Island (Canadian Geographic). Attacks are certainly becoming more frequent because cougars are becoming more accustomed to human activity. As a result, their behavioural patterns are changing and they are much less likely to flee at first sight. This results in them becoming a lot more dangerous to humans. Parks Canada is now giving each hiker an information session about cougars and how to handle sightings and encounters to help reduce the damage to both cougars and humans. Ultimately, when a cougar kills a human, it is usually hunted down and killed as a result.
4. **Fletcher Challenge** (a logging company) punched through a logging road into Sandstone Creek, a small pristine watershed on the southern edge of the proposed West Coast Trail Rainforest protected wilderness area. Though the provincial government has placed logging moratorium on the Upper Carmanah and Lower Walbran Valleys, much of the West Coast Trail buffer areas remain open to logging. The area adjacent to the West Coast Trail is being rapidly cut to ribbons by roads and clearcuts (Western Canada Wilderness Committee).

## Assignment

1. In a paragraph, describe the West Coast Trail.
2. What are the advantages of the West Coast Trail?
3. What are the detrimental impacts that have happened to the West Coast Trail?
4. Offer 3 solutions to protecting and preserving the West Coast Trail.