



SEA TO SKY STORY: FORESTS

Some of Canada's most diverse geography and plant life lines the scenic Sea to Sky Highway. Leafy deciduous trees and evergreens border snow-topped mountains, an ocean fiord and glacier-cut valleys. British Columbia's coastline has the wettest weather and the tallest trees in Canada.

Stanley Park is a good introduction to British Columbia's coastal forests: western red cedar, western hemlock, and imposing Douglas-fir are a few of the characteristically West Coast species to see. Many of the trees in the park are over 150 years old.



Wetter lowlands

As Highway 99 leaves Stanley Park, it travels through forests dominated by young Douglas-fir with arbutus trees before reaching the coastal rainforest at Howe Sound. Covered with smooth, bronze-coloured bark, arbutus is the only broadleaf evergreen native to Canada.

Highway 99, also known as the Sea to Sky Highway, passes through two different climate zones, each with its own characteristic weather and tree species.

When you reach Squamish at the tip of Howe Sound, you will find whitebark pine, yellow-cedar, subalpine fir and mountain hemlock at higher elevations. Further north, around Cheekye, the forests are dominated by second growth Douglas-fir with many western hemlock seedlings growing beneath.



At Lions Bay Village, bigleaf maple replaces arbutus. Bigleaf maple is one of the largest and fastest growing maples in Canada with leaves that can reach more than 30 centimetres in diameter. Like eastern maples, bigleaf sap can be made into syrup.

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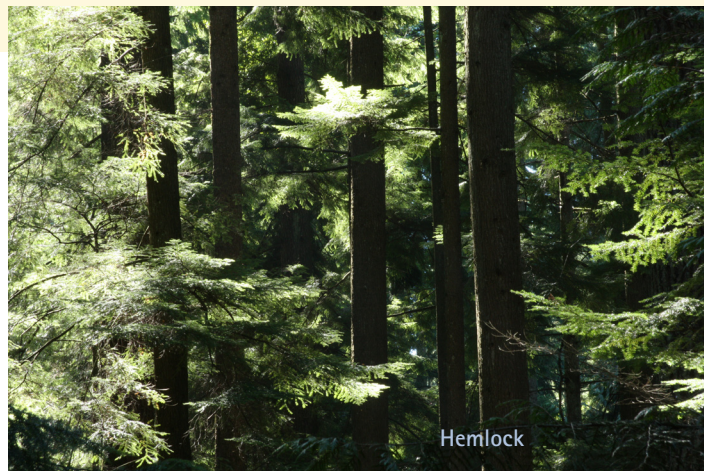
AROUND BROHM LAKE, THE FIRS AND HEMLOCKS GIVE WAY TO LODGEPOLE PINE – PERHAPS AS A RESULT OF DRIER CONDITIONS IN THAT AREA. INTERPRETIVE SIGNS AND WALKS AT THE LAKE PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE TREES IN THE AREA. THE LODGEPOLE PINE, A STAPLE OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FOREST INDUSTRY, HAS BEEN WIDELY ATTACKED BY THE MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE. RED AND GREY DEAD TREES MARK THE PATH OF THE BEETLE AROUND THE PROVINCE, PRIMARILY IN THE INTERIOR BUT ALSO IN THE SEA TO SKY REGION. THE IMPACT OF THE PINE BEETLE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IS ESTIMATED AT 14.5 MILLION HECTARES – AN AREA LARGER THAN THE SIZE OF ENGLAND.

Drier highlands

North of Squamish, the Sea to Sky Highway leaves the coast and travels inland into a drier climate zone. At Cheakamus Canyon, the valley floor opens up and the forest changes from one dominated by Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine to one of large western hemlock and western red cedar.

Forests in this area are very important for timber production. The Squamish Forest District produces about 25,000 truckloads of logs annually. The sustainable management of this working forest area requires an ongoing effort by forest managers to balance silvicultural practices, wildlife habitat and recreational use.

A significant percentage of the planet's temperate rainforest is located in British Columbia. The heavy rainfall and mild temperatures are perfect for growing record-breaking trees, both in size and age. Sitka spruce, western red cedar and Douglas-fir regularly grow up to 60 metres tall and can live to be over 800 years old. The Carmanah Giant, a 96-metre tall Sitka spruce on Vancouver Island is reputed to be the tallest standing tree in Canada and the tallest Douglas-fir is 94 metres tall.



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*Evergreens can be recognized by the colour and texture of their needles and cones.
From left: western red cedar cones, Douglas-fir cones, western red cedar needles, Douglas-fir needles.*

The Canadian Forest Service of Natural Resources Canada conducts research into various aspects of forest ecology to further the sustainable use and competitiveness of our forests. Research efforts are focused on issues such as climate change, forest fires and invasive insects and diseases. Researchers work to predict and prepare for change in our forests. There is still much to learn about our forests. If you want to be part of the solution, consider a career with the Canadian Forest Service.

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