

Geology

At 40 million years of age, the "Metchosin Volcanics" are the youngest addition to Vancouver Island's patchwork geology. They are the result of a massive undersea upheaval of the earth's crust, with a great outpouring of molten lava that cooled quickly in contact with the cold sea water. This produced characteristic bulbous lava pillows, rather like the drips from an overflowing wax candle. Subsequent movement of the Earth's plates drove this formation onto the continental shelf where it was uplifted. The best place in North America to view these curious shapes is said to be Tower Point in Witty's Lagoon Park, where they are easy to recognize, particularly on the small offshore islets.

Much later, successive glaciations smoothed and grooved the upper surface of the lava by the action of rocks imbedded at the foot of the ice; the direction of their flow is marked by the alignment of the grooves. Glaciers have left their mark in several other ways: the soil of Metchosin consists chiefly of glacial gravel and clay; Metchosin's beaches, some sandy and some pebbly, are formed by the detritus of the ice cover; and there are occasional huge "erratic" boulders. Our lakes and streams were first formed by glacial melt water. Sea level was higher than now, before the land rebounded from the weight of the ice. Raised beaches can be found here and there, like the one in Devonian Park.



SPONSORS:
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Metchosin Green Mapping Group
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Metchosin Community GREEN MAP



Pillow lava of Tower Point. T. J. WATT

Coastal Ecosystems

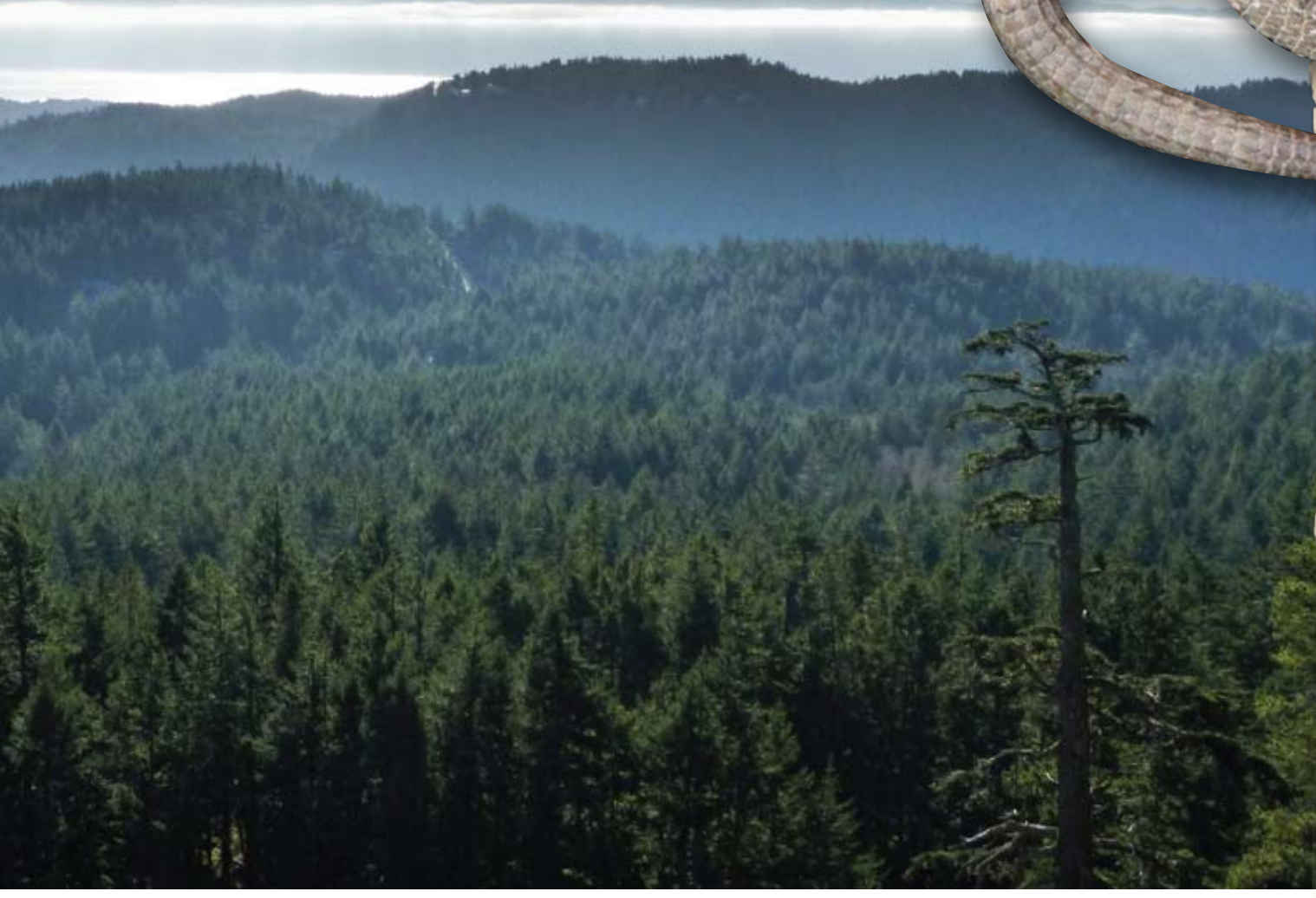
Metchosin has over 50 kilometres of coastline; an ever-changing connection between terrestrial uplands and the open ocean. Tidal marshes, lagoons, estuaries, bays, eelgrass beds, high speed current channels, surge channels, underwater caves, vertical underwater cliffs, boulder beaches, rocky headlands, sand beaches and pocket beaches fringe our shoreline.

Historically these ecosystems were extensively used by First Nations as a productive food resource. Forage fish such as Pacific sand lance and surf smelt spawn on the beaches. Herring and rockfish feed and spawn near the shoreline interface and in kelp beds. Juvenile salmon and cutthroat trout migrate along shorelines, often relying on the protective habitat of overhanging vegetation or kelp beds. River otters den in several locations. Offshore eelgrass beds provide a critical nurturing meadow for bottom fish and invertebrates.

There are five coastal lagoons unique to southern Vancouver Island in Metchosin that provide valuable habitat for migratory and resident seabirds. The two largest lagoons (Witty's and Albert Head) have spits replenished respectively by eroding bluffs and a gravel pit. Albert Head sits at Metchosin's northeast corner and is well cherished by local residents. The shores of Tower Point and at Witty's



Sunrise over Tower Point. T. J. WATT



Looking south over Metchosin. T. J. WATT

Parks and Trails

Regional and community parks in Metchosin protect just over 10% of the green and blue spaces that make up the landscapes, ecosystems, and scenic features of the community. Three provincial Crown land parcels (618.36 ha) are used for recreation in Metchosin. Section 25 is known as Metchosin Park or the 100 Acre Wood. This 39.7 ha forested area contains a range of forest communities from dry upland to moist valley bottom and a small wetland. A network of trails provides access to most parts of the forest and numerous access points around the park perimeter. Section 95 is another 39.7 ha forested area that serves the residents of the Lindholm/Neild Rd neighborhood. A smaller 20.5 ha, Crown land parcel, Section 28, slopes up from the Galloping Goose Regional Trail to the neighbourhoods on Libra Road and Gemini Drive. The dry upland coniferous forest is interspersed with numerous rock outcroppings.

There are four regional parks in Metchosin: Albert Head Lagoon, Devonian, Matheson Lake and Witty's Lagoon. A large area along the northwestern boundary is part of Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park Reserve. Links to maps and descriptions of regional parks in Metchosin on the internet can be found at crd.bc.ca/parks/location.htm.

Metchosin has a system of community parks and trail rights-of-way. The largest parks are the Eleanor Mann,

Lagoon are rich in recreational potential and provide a habitat for harbour seals. The Witty's Lagoon spit has sensitive dune vegetation and a wide beach at low tide, behind the spit is a classic estuary ecosystem. Fresh water from Bilston Creek mixes with the salt water from Parry Bay to form brackish water in the lagoon. Open water, salt pans and salt tolerant vegetation on a peat bog provide an exceptional site for migrating waterfowl, as well as eagles, hawks, kingfishers and other creatures that make their home here. The underwater rocky shore of Albert Head is habitat for marine invertebrates, making it an ideal scuba diving location (accessible by boat).

Taylor Beach on Parry Bay contains the Lagoons at the mouths of Sherwood and Gooch Creeks. These often break out through the spits after heavy winter rainfall, providing stream access for sea-run cutthroat trout to enter and spawn. In the winter, diving ducks, mergansers and loons frequent the waters offshore and gulls feed on the debris washed up at the height of winter storms. Orcas are sometimes seen traversing this bay in the late summer. Weir's Beach Lagoon has been converted to residential use.

William Head's current-swept coastline harbours many invertebrate and fish species. It protects Pedder Bay, whose mud-bottomed ecosystem provides forage for winter migrant waterfowl and also supports a commercial crab fishery. Salmon and halibut are abundant in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The upper end of Pedder Bay is an estuary in winter as fresh water discharges from several streams into the bay. A colony of double-crested cormorants are winter roosting visitors on the tops of Douglas-fir lining the south side of the bay. The shoreline, from William Head around to Beecher Bay and several nearby islands, supports populations of rare coastal plant species as well as a subtidal community of organisms which thrive on the current-swept waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Of particular importance is the high biodiversity of the Race Rocks Archipelago, a series of nine islands protected for research and education as the Race Rocks Ecological Reserve at the most southern point of Western Canada. Elephant and harbour seals give birth there each spring, and California and northern sea lions haul out on the islands during the winter months. Four species of seabirds nest on the rocks and thousands of seabirds use them as a winter stopover. The highly diverse fish, invertebrate and marine algae population thrive in the inter- and sub-tidal zones where nutrients from strong currents sweep the rocks. The historic Race Rocks Lighthouse, erected by the British in 1860, is the only stone light tower on the west coast of Canada. The wonders of this ecosystem can be seen live by a virtual tour, together with coastal profile of Metchosin, at racecocks.com



Witty's Lagoon. TONY ALSTON

Blue Spaces

Blue Spaces are Metchosin's marine and freshwater systems; lakes, creeks, streams, ponds, lagoons, seasonal watercourses and intertidal zones. Wetlands make a major contribution to biodiversity as well as provide clean water and recreational opportunities.

Bilston Creek is the major watershed which spans Metchosin, although its origins are in Langford along Humpback Road. Its tributaries include Martin Creek, Firchall Creek, Pritchard Creek, Lookout Brook, Metchosin Creek, Cole Creek, Hewett Creek, Espley Creek and Pilgrim Creek. The final outlet for all this water is Witty's Lagoon spilling over the spectacular Sitting Lady Falls in Witty's Lagoon Regional Park. Bilston Creek and the gravel beds of its tributaries are home to a natural population of cutthroat trout.

Matheson Lake, the largest of Metchosin's three lakes has its outlet in Matheson Creek which flows to the sea through Roche Cove Regional Park (in neighbouring East Sooke). The lake supports cutthroat trout, rainbow trout and bass, many amphibians and endangered western painted turtles. The small, sandy beach is the main summer swimming hole where children delight in spotting rough-skinned newts and juvenile fishes. Glinz Lake supports rainbow trout and plays a central role in the popular Camp Thunderbird outdoor experience. Blinkhorn, the smallest lake, is stocked with cutthroat trout and bass.



Flora and Fauna

Metchosin's coast, meadows, forests, woodlands and mountainous areas include some of Canada's rarest species and ecosystems. Located in the rainshadow of the Olympic Mountains, the district experiences a Mediterranean type climate of warm, dry summers followed by cool, wet winters, which favour flora and fauna that are unique in Canada. The Garry oak woodland is one of the rarest ecosystems in Canada, and the remnant old growth Coastal Douglas-fir forests at Mary Hill and Rocky Point are considered globally significant.

The earliest records of Metchosin (an 1858 map of "Metchosin District") show it as almost continuously forested, with Garry oak woodlands covering most of the area between present-day William Head Road and Parry Bay and the eastern portion of Rocky Point, with coniferous forest covering the rest of the district. The coniferous forest is predominantly Douglas-fir, with lesser amounts of grand fir, western redcedar, arbutus, bigleaf maple and red alder. Above 150m elevation there is more western hemlock. There are also smaller non-forested ecosystems such as moss bald grasslands at higher elevations, salt marsh and swamp wetlands and beach communities.

Some of these ecosystems have changed considerably since they were first mapped. Metchosin, in contrast to much of the region, retains substantial examples of most of its native ecosystems and species. The Garry oak woodlands along Parry Bay have largely been converted to agricultural fields, and the fire-maintained oak woodlands on Rocky Point have, with cessation of aboriginal burning in the early 1900s, mostly succeeded to coniferous forest. Some of the forest has been cleared for settlement, agriculture and other uses.

The 5,634 hectares of forested area contain shrubby understories where heath family shrubs such as salal and red huckleberry predominate. Other common species are oceanspray and several wild roses, Oregon grape, twinflower, trailing blackberry, and wildflowers such as Pacific trillium and columbine. The Garry oak woodlands, much reduced from their historical distribution in our community, represent one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems, and feature a rich springtime tapestry of wildflowers such as chocolate lily, western buttercup and springgold. Camas and fawn lilies are two native wildflowers that almost define Metchosin in the springtime. Many of the remnant oak ecosystems are awash in a sea of clear blue camas lilies, the bulbs once a mainstay of the Coast Salish diet. Disturbed places are often dominated by introduced invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry, Scotch broom and gorse.

Although much of the Metchosin area was logged during times of settlement for timber and land clearing, giant old-growth Douglas fir and redcedar still exist and can be found in small pockets or hidden away as solitary giants. These so called "Veteran Trees" were left behind for one reason or another and still stand today as a reminder of the primeval forest that once covered this land. Some of the largest Douglas-firs can be found in and about the trail encircling Matheson Lake. Not far from there is Metchosin's largest recorded tree, a Douglas-fir measuring 9'6 in diameter! The huge redcedars tend to grow in the wetter areas with the widest recorded at 26ft in circumference, growing along Bilston Creek. Other fine places to

Ponds are sprinkled throughout Metchosin. Some have been excavated for irrigation, water retention or fish farming. Others are natural depressions that are water-filled year round but are too small to be considered lakes. They support numerous amphibians, mammals and birds that require wetlands for nesting, drinking or as a food source.

Ephemeral or seasonal ponds and watercourses are also important as breeding sites for rare red-legged frogs and zooplankton and uncommon vernal wetland plant communities. They also serve as retention ponds that moderate heavy runoff and consequent damage. Many of Metchosin's wetlands are on private land and their continued existence and health depend on the stewardship provided by landowners.

The most massive aquatic feature is unseen: the water table. All the other fresh water systems contribute to, and/or feed off the water table. Metchosin's underground water situation is extremely complex and known only imperfectly. Wells in some areas are very productive while others nearby are not. The broken basal geology of much of the district accounts for some of this diversity and localised effects. Maintaining water tables depends partly upon maintaining vegetation (and vice versa). Forest and riparian root systems buffer the flow of water during heavy rains and snow melt, prevent erosion and protect the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater.



see these towering giants are Witty's Lagoon Trail, the Hillman Trail and Metchosin Mountain.

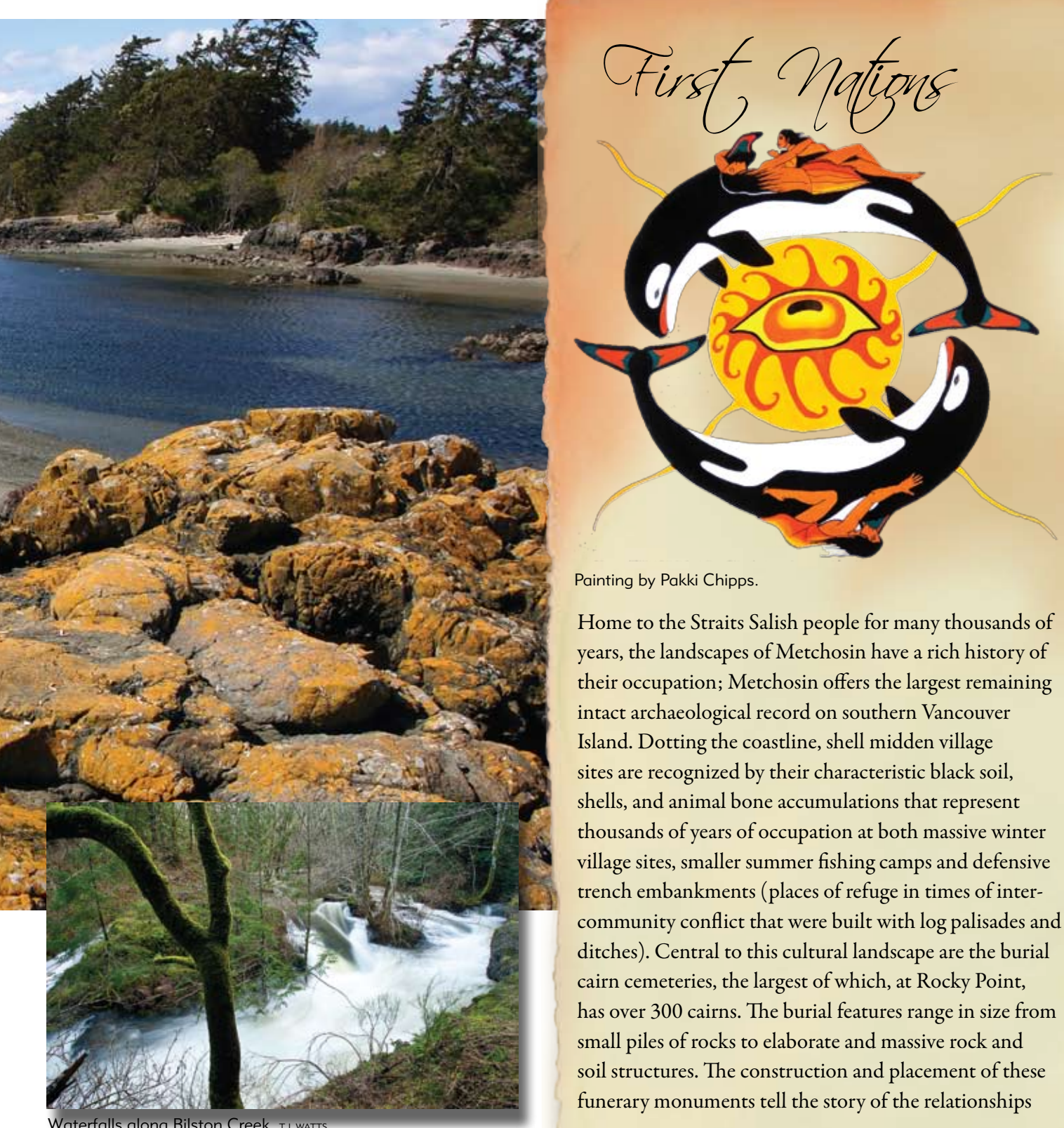
Many animals that are infrequent or absent from much of the CRD still make Metchosin their home. They include large animals such as black bears and cougars and in the northwest, wolves. Many more obscure but rarer species of flora and fauna associated with the Mediterranean type climate and unique habitats also occur. Diminutive sharp-tailed snakes, Moss' elfin butterflies, rigid apple moss, Macoun's meadowfoam, the beautiful blue Howel's trileta lily and slim-leaf onion are just a few of the remarkable treasures that still have a hold on the landscape and our hearts.

Metchosin is also blessed with a rich bird fauna, both resident and migratory. The Rocky Point Bird Observatory is a neo-tropical migratory bird monitoring site that is active from July through October: 299 species have been recorded there. Since 2002 the Observatory has conducted a northern saw-whet owl banding project, the first of its kind in Canada.

The district's unique natural history is, in part, displayed at the Municipal Hall and Community House gardens, which are planted with a diverse array of native wildflowers.

- ▲ Northern Alligator Lizard, NOVARENA MELNE
- ▲ Chocolate Lily, NOVARENA MELNE

Background photo: Tufted Saurfrage.



Waterfalls along Bilston Creek. T. J. WATT



Walls Pears on Happy Valley Road in the early 1900's. COURTESY OF METCHOSIN SCHOOL MUSEUM



Metchosin's largest redcedar along Bilston Creek. T. J. WATT



BC's iconic artist and writer, Emily Carr (1871-1945) loved to visit Metchosin and made many excursions here to sketch and paint its lovely shoreline, dramatic seascapes and dense forests.



Home to the Straits Salish people for many thousands of years, the landscapes of Metchosin have a rich history of their occupation; Metchosin offers the largest remaining intact archaeological record on southern Vancouver Island. Dotted the coastline, shell midden village sites are recognized by their characteristic black soil, shells, and animal bone accumulations that represent thousands of years of occupation at both massive winter village sites, smaller summer fishing camps and defensive trench embankments (places of refuge in times of inter-community conflict that were built with log palisades and ditches). Central to this cultural landscape are the burial cairn cemeteries, the largest of which, at Rocky Point, has over 300 cairns. The burial features range in size from small piles of rocks to elaborate and massive rock and soil structures. The construction and placement of these funerary monuments tell the story of the relationships



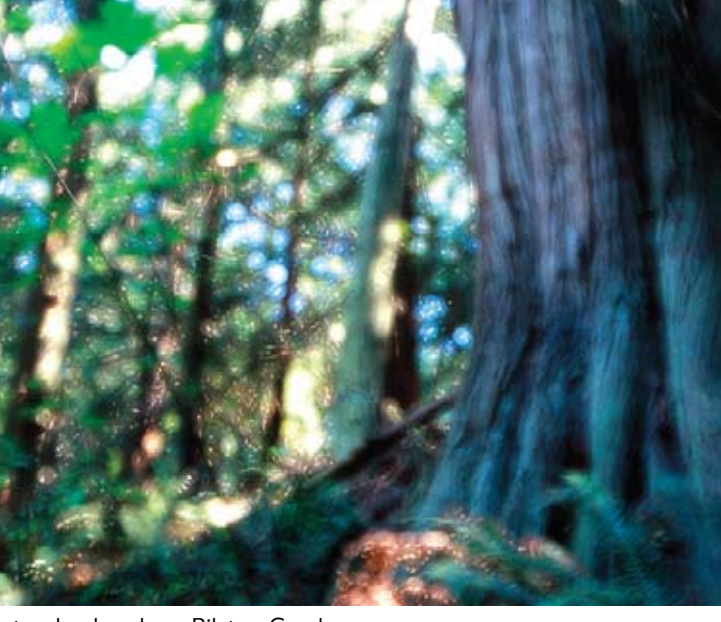
Ron Weir in Beecher Bay First Nation cedar dugout, 1921.



Annual Sheep Dog Trials. TONY ALSTON



A common road-side scene. TONY ALSTON



providing nest boxes for birds and pollinating mason bees, nectar plants for hummingbirds and butterflies, rock piles for snakes and lizards, ponds for amphibians, by incorporating native plants in their landscape activities and by removing invasive species. Residents have helped preserve natural areas by placing conservation covenants on more than 70 hectares of natural landscape. The recently established Metchosin Foundation, a local charitable organization will, among other things, assist landowners who wish to covenant or bequeath their lands for conservation (metchosinfoundation.ca).

between the Straits Salish people and their physical, social, and spiritual landscape, as well as connections among kin and neighbours.

First Nations peoples also managed the physical landscape for their livelihood. Annual burning over millennia maintained an open savannah to allow cultivation of edible camas bulbs and berries (for subsistence and trade) and to promote browse for deer. With cessation of burning more than a century ago, the structure and composition of the woodlands changed, with succession from savannah, to Garry oak parkland, to Douglas-fir forest.

The people of Beecher Bay/SCIANEW First Nation are Metchosin's southern neighbours at the Beecher Bay Reserve, where they continue their historic association with the landscape of Metchosin and surrounding areas. Tribal Journeys, a canoe voyage from the northern island to the shores of Washington state, is an annual summer celebration of their ancient culture.

All archaeological sites are protected by the Heritage Conservation Act. Questions about potential archaeological sites can be addressed to the BC Archaeology Branch at (250) 953-3334.



Paddle by Chief Russ Chippis.



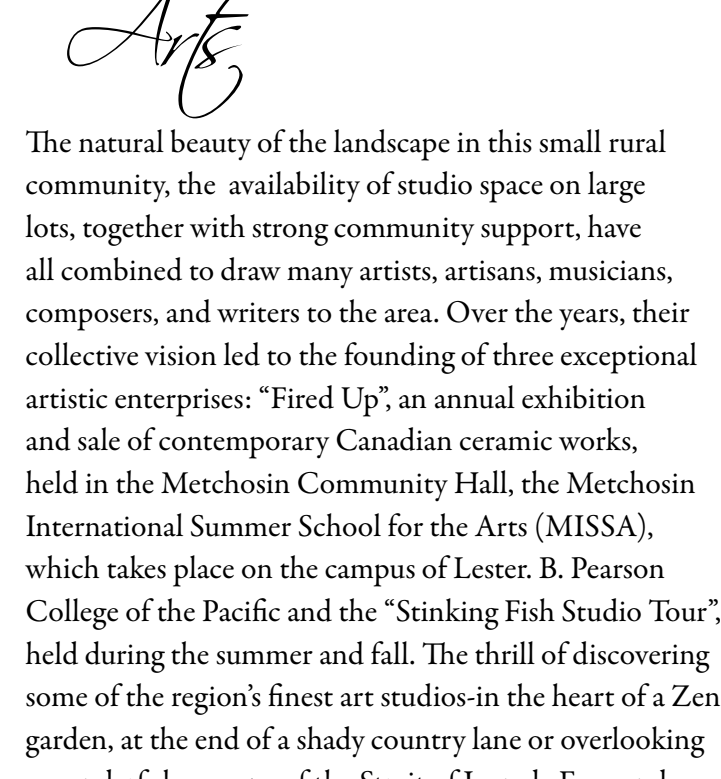
Rattles by Randy Chippis.



Annual Sheep Dog Trials. TONY ALSTON



A common road-side scene. TONY ALSTON



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Rocky Point Road. COURTESY OF METCHOSIN SCHOOL MUSEUM

Post Contact Heritage

Metchosin lay beyond the Hudson's Bay Company-owned farms that extended as far as Colwood. Here the land was taken up by settlers of a more independent mind.

The first colonial settlement of Metchosin was the Bilston Creek Farm, established in 1853 on 385 acres (155.8 ha). According to the 1855 census of Vancouver Island, it had two acres (0.8 ha) of improved farmland. The farm was sold several times, eventually being purchased by John Witty in 1867 (and, much diminished by subsequent subdivisions and donations, remained within the Witty family until just recently). Early settlers' names live on in natural and manmade local features: Blinkhorn (lake), Weir (beach), Helgesen (school) Witty (lagoon and beach) and others. These families' stories are well told in the book "Footprints" (Metchosin School Museum Society, 1983) and in Bess Page's booklet "Metchosin Names."

Shortly after his arrival, Robert Weir, one of the first settlers, received custody of a flock of sheep that the Hudson's Bay Company had imported from England. Perhaps the blood of those original



Threshing in Metchosin. COURTESY OF METCHOSIN SCHOOL MUSEUM

Agriculture

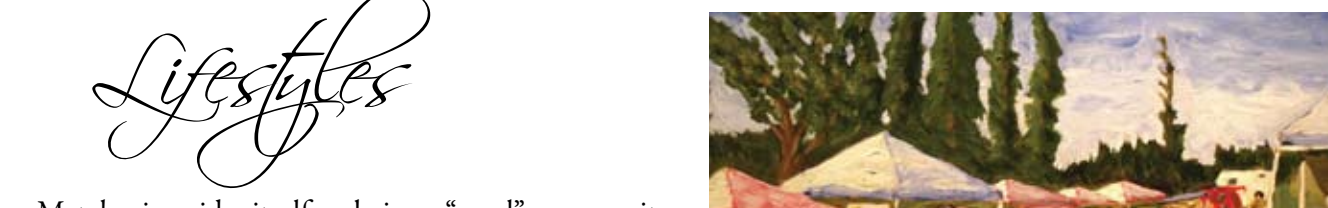
Both nature itself and the aboriginal inhabitants had created many open spaces well suited to European agriculture when settlers arrived in the 1850's.

Metchosin is unique among the four Westshore municipalities in retaining almost all its original Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) land of 1,070 hectares. Only a few of the approximately 150 farmers in Metchosin live without off-farm income, but all of them are passionate food producers. Many are just as passionate about growing food organically.

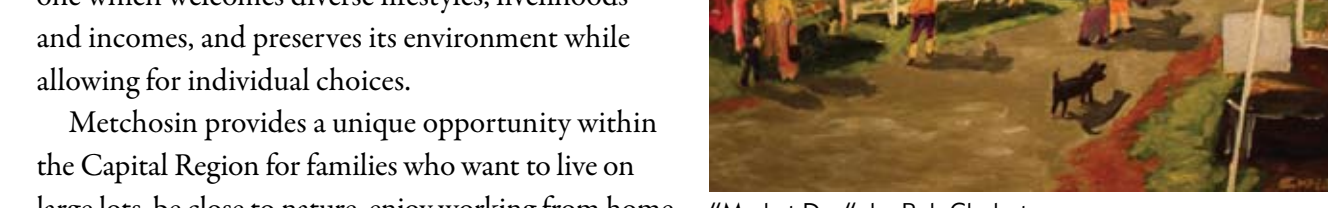
Metchosin is home to one of the largest commercial sheep flocks on Vancouver Island and hosts the annual Metchosin Sheep Dog Trial and Clinic, begun in 1992. Sheep farming is an important component of agriculture in Metchosin and flocking lambs in spring are an annual tourist attraction.



Annual Sheep Dog Trials. TONY ALSTON



A common road-side scene. TONY ALSTON



"Market Day" by Rob Chobot

Residents play an active role in maintaining the natural values of the landscape by

Foggy view looking toward Juan de Fuca Strait over William Head Road.

Institutions

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE (DND)
Federal institutions have played a major and colourful role in Metchosin's past history and current life. In 1895 the Dominion Government established a Quarantine Station at William Head and all ships arriving from foreign ports were required to stop in Parry Bay for medical inspection. During the First World War, around 80,000 troops were recruited in Asia to clean up the battlefields of France and Belgium. They arrived by the shipload at William Head Quarantine Station where they were billeted until they could be sent on their way by transcontinental train and thence to Europe. They returned by the same route. When the need for quarantine inspection ended worldwide, William Head Institution became a federal minimum security penitentiary, which it remains today.

Early in the Second World War heavy gun batteries were positioned at Albert Head, Mary Hill and Christopher Point, and powerful searchlights were sited at intervals along the shoreline. Fortunately the guns were never put to the test. The concrete emplacements remain, however, and now harbour a colony of rare Townsend's big-eared bats. During the war the community bristled with Canadian troops doing exercises and tactical maneuvers. These lands are still held and used by the DND for training.

In 1952, the federal government acquired most of Rocky Point, as well as adjoining Bentinck Island (formerly a leper colony), for the Naval Armament Depot. A major (if unintended) benefit of federal lands (now totaling 1,322.1 ha) has been to protect extensive archeological sites and natural habitats.

CAMP THUNDERBIRD

Beginning in 1935 with 145.69 ha of land at Glinz Lake in northwest Metchosin, the YM/YWCA has expanded to a 485.6 ha wilderness experience for many school-aged children from throughout the region.

WILD ANIMAL REHABILITATION CENTRE (Wild A.R.C.)

Located at 1020 Malloch Drive, Wild Arc is the only wildlife rehabilitation centre on southern Vancouver Island. It cares for injured and orphaned wildlife until they are rehabilitated and can be released into the wild. It is not open for public tours.



Endangered Sharp-tailed snake, MICHOLE WARE



Heron resting in a tree, T.J. WART



Some place names remember the famous and infamous

or celebrate old colonial ties, while others denote prominent features. Metchosin was derived from the Coast Salish "Smets-Shosin" or "Stinking Fish", when



the most prominent feature of the area was the aroma of the rotting corpse of a beached whale. Legend has it that the huge whale vertebrae on display at Witty's Lagoon Nature House are the last physical reminders of that long ago occasion.

View from Comas Hill, T.J. WART

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB
The 39.66 hectare Metchosin Wilderness Camp at 3900 Metchosin Road has been owned and operated by the Boys and Girls Club since 1984. It offers extensive outdoor recreational adventure-based programs, educational and cultural retreats, therapeutic and respite services, organic agricultural opportunities and environmental stewardship activities.

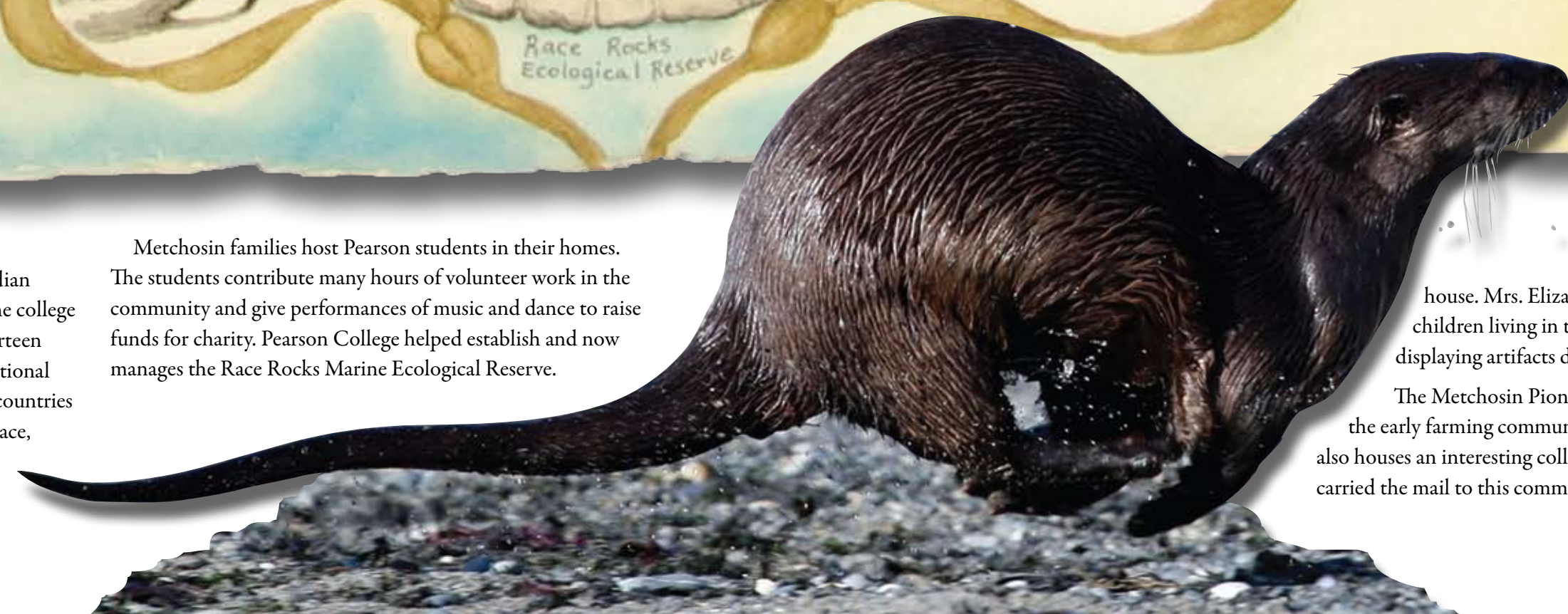
◀ Twisted redcedar along Hillman Trail, T.J. WART
▶ "My Metchosin" by Hans Helgesen Elementary School student.



LESTER B. PEARSON COLLEGE OF THE PACIFIC

Founded in 1974 and named in honour of the late Canadian Prime Minister and Nobel Laureate, Lester B. Pearson, the college promotes world peace and understanding. It is one of thirteen United World Colleges which provide a two year International Baccalaureate program. Outstanding students from 100 countries attend on full scholarship and are selected regardless of race, religion, politics, or financial means. On graduation, they are determined to make a difference in their home communities and work in a positive way for peace.

Metchosin families host Pearson students in their homes. The students contribute many hours of volunteer work in the community and give performances of music and dance to raise funds for charity. Pearson College helped establish and now manages the Race Rocks Marine Ecological Reserve.



Museums

In 1871 Metchosin's first public building was constructed, a one-room school house. Mrs. Elizabeth Fisher, the first teacher, opened the doors in the spring of 1872 for ten children living in the area. The building is still in service today as the Metchosin School Museum, displaying artifacts donated by Metchosin's pioneer families.

The Metchosin Pioneer Museum is located on the municipal grounds. Inside is a mural depicting the early farming community. Artifacts are displayed within a typical farmhouse interior. The museum also houses an interesting collection of farm equipment and is home to the Colwood - Metchosin stage which carried the mail to this community in the early 1900's.

◀ Northern river otter, TONY AUSTIN
▶ Quarantine Station Waterline Trail, Pedder Bay, COURTESY OF METCHOSIN SCHOOL MUSEUM



Village Centre

At the heart of Metchosin lies the village centre, where most commercial, social, political and cultural activities occur. The Metchosin Technical School and Metchosin Arts and Cultural Centre share space in the old Metchosin Elementary School, bringing vitality to a building once seen as superfluous to community needs. The Firehall and Emergency Operations Centre and their dedicated volunteer crews, the Municipal Hall, riding ring, cricket field, bike jump park, Pioneer Museum and Farmers' Market all reside on the municipal grounds at 4450 Happy Valley Rd. Next door is the Community House, where activities range from artistic events to adult day care. The village includes a small shopping district with restaurants and stores, three large murals, a public tennis court, two museums, the historic Community Hall, and a heritage church and cemetery.

Life in Metchosin is enriched throughout the year by some cultural activity. The district's largest community event, Metchosin Day, is held the first Sunday after Labour Day showcasing Metchosin's rural nature.

Top Photo: Fawn Lily.



St. Mary's Church and Cemetery, TONY AUSTIN

St. Mary's Church and Cemetery

The Church of Saint Mary's the Virgin is on Metchosin Road near the village centre. Dedicated in 1873, it is one of the oldest Anglican churches on the Island. According to legend, John Witty and Sir James Douglas were talking about the need for a church in Metchosin. Sir James suggested he give the land and Witty give the money; Witty countered by suggesting that he would give the land and Sir James give the money, which is what occurred. Witty gave two acres (0.8 ha) and Douglas contributed \$100.

The oak tree near the entrance to the church is a seedling from Windsor Park, reflecting the connection with the British royal family. Lady Emily Mary Seymour Walker, whose brother was best childhood friend of Edward Prince of Wales, later Duke of Windsor, is buried in the churchyard.

An iron fence surrounds the graves of Edward and Mary Ann Vine. Mary Ann, who arrived in Victoria in 1853, was described as a tall, handsome woman with deep blue eyes. She was the midwife for all who lived here, European and First Nations, and she walked great distances to help deliver babies. She was known as a formidable woman with a temper. History has it that once, on her way home, she came across a cougar which had killed one of her lambs. Fearlessly, she frightened the cougar away and proceeded to carry the lamb home.

