

West Coast Grail

Over 120 years after her forebears settled along one of the West Coast's most unforgiving shorelines, a young writer returns to her family's long-abandoned settlement, where roots run deep and spirits still move.

By Danielle Baker

Since Great-grandmother died in 1976, her presence can still be felt — and often feared. On the Pacific Ocean side of British Columbia's Vancouver Island, Maggie Logan's house has been known to freak out intrepid hikers on the West Coast Trail, Canada's most famous marine hiking route.

Reportedly, those who stop to camp on Stanley Beach, where the remains of her homestead are, feel unwelcome. Some have even packed up late in the evening and moved on. When my cousin Sarah and I arrive at the beach, on a surprisingly warm and bright West Coast day, we locate the hidden path and tread lightly towards the sand. This is our first day hiking south on the trail from the Nitinat Narrows, an option only recently made available to the public, and it's been our family's most common entry point for the last century. The trail forces us to walk over the collapsed roof of the old home, and we pause and ask for permission. We explain, of course, that we are family.

What is left of the home, which was still standing in the late 80s, is visibly dilapidated and unsafe to enter. As Grandma Ardis told it, it was around that time that a couple of hikers happened upon a little old lady gardening out in front. They called to her, and without saying a word, she quickly hurried around the side of the house and out of sight. Later, when they recalled the story to a long-time resident on the trail, they were told they described our great-grandmother Maggie perfectly, from her slight four-foot-eleven-inch stature to her tiny size-four cork boots, custom-made for hiking her trapline. But no one had lived in that house since 1943, and Great-grandmother had died years before.

Not long after, my Grandma Ardis camped here as she always did. Out of nowhere appeared a small kitten that affectionately greeted Grandma but wouldn't go near her companion, and then it wandered off into the bush. After setting up camp and eating dinner, the companion asked to move on. She felt unwelcome and was too uncom-

fortable to sleep. Maybe the cat spooked her, or maybe it was the way my Grandma's dog kept greeting the thin air with its unique howl reserved only for family.

The West Coast Trail follows 75 kilometres (47 miles) of treacherous shoreline from Port Renfrew north to Bamfield. Built to maintain telegraph lines from Victoria, the trail became an established Life Saving Road to access shipwrecks and their survivors after a particularly tragic loss in 1906. The wrecks between 1858 and 1973 became so numerous that this area became known as the "Graveyard of the Pacific." When the government withdrew funding from the Dididaht Village of Clo-oose and other remote coastal communities after World War II, most of the long-time residents were forced to relocate. In the summer of 1970, the Life Saving Road was included in the Pacific Rim National Park and was renamed the West Coast Trail. More than 50,000 people hiked it between 1973 and 1977, and about 6,000 still hike it annually. Parks Canada requires reservations. Trail access sells out well before the trail opens in May. But not for my family. We are grandfathered in, maybe because our great-great-grandfather David Logan and great-grandfather Bill had a hand in building it. Before my Grandma Ardis passed away, park officials wrote a letter granting us access to visit, among other things, our great-great-grandfather's grave.

As children growing up in Bamfield, we would sit captivated by Grandma Ardis's stories about life on the rugged west coast, primarily about my Grandpa Bill's family who settled in Clo-oose, near Stanley Beach, in 1894. The tales were colourful and adventurous: the horse dropped off the side of a steamship, left to swim ashore;

Photo: Courtesy Danielle Baker



RUGGED AND RAD Above: The author's family gathers, circa 1930. Seated second from left is the author's great-great-grandfather David followed by her great-great-grandmother Sarah. Standing, second from left, is Bill Logan, her great-grandfather. Bottom: Salvage floats and buoys at the Darling River campsite on the West Coast Trail. Over the past few decades, competitive trail runners have found these on the beach and carved their names and running times into them before hanging them from trees along the trail.

Photo: Tree Frendo





HIKING THE WEST COAST TRAIL WITH OUR GRANDMA ARDIS WAS A COMING-OF-AGE RITE. SHE LOVED PUTTING HER STORIES INTO CONTEXT BY POINTING OUT THE LANDMARKS: THE FAMILY HOUSE ON STANLEY BEACH, THE ORIGINAL HOMESTEAD ON THE BLUFF ABOVE CLO-OOSE, THE TWISTED TREES OUR GRANDPA BILL HAD TIED TOGETHER ON HIS WAY TO SCHOOL.



the time our great-great-grandfather used too much dynamite to strip the siding off the house; the keg of moonshine our great-grandfather kept buried under the floorboards. Much like reading aloud from a favourite storybook, Grandma would recount these stories for our pleasure. Of all her tales, my favourite was her first date with my Grandpa. They hiked his trapline, and she drowned the raccoon caught in the trap. While shaking the water off the freshly killed pelt, the animal came back to life. "The time Grandma Logan drowned the same raccoon twice" remains a popular story at family gatherings.

Hiking the West Coast Trail with our Grandma Ardis was a coming-of-age rite. She loved putting her stories into context by pointing out the landmarks: the family house on Stanley Beach, the original homestead on the bluff above Clo-oose, the twisted trees our Grandpa Bill had tied together on his way to school, and the trapline cabin our great-grandmother Maggie built by hand. She would set out with her vintage hiking gear and a sheet of plastic to sleep under, while my cousins struggled to keep up with her. Unfortunately, her health prevented her from ever hiking with Sarah and me, and she passed away in 2016. By then, she had already given us all that we needed. She had mapped out the trail with her stories. Sarah and I would follow them.

Approximately halfway along the West Coast Trail hikers are forced to cross the Nitinat Narrows by boat. Twenty-three kilometres up this saltwater lake is the property our grandparents bought almost 50 years ago. It is the same land that my grandfather had camped on during canoe trips as a child with his parents and where many of us grandchildren would spend our summers growing up. It was also here, around a campfire the night before we set out, that our family shared Grandma's stories, remembering a few we had forgotten and piecing together lost details. We used these stories to make notes for our journey, for example, after the trees make a tunnel over the trail, start looking to your left and you'll see it. We especially embraced renditions of Grandma's ghost stories. Her otherworldly tales would range from hair-raising to whimsical — the latter usually the result of a few ciders. However, the ones that centered around Stanley Beach, where Grandpa grew up, were told like any other piece of family history: as fact.

The landmark we sought most was an area just north of Clo-oose that likely doesn't get a second look from most hikers. The green ivy choking each side of the trail wouldn't trigger curiosity with tired walkers just wanting to get to the next campsite. But we know something they could never know: the invasive species had been inten-



HISTORY ON THE EDGE
Clockwise from top left: Dan Holiday, one of the trail's linemen, after a hunting trip with Bill Logan; Alfred Logan with his cougar hounds and a cougar he killed draped over his bicycle; Alfred and Ardis Logan (seated centre) in Nitinat, BC, circa 1989, surrounded by their children and grandchildren; Pachena Lighthouse from the air, circa 1980. Pachena Bay (the north end of the West Coast Trail) and Bamfield lies just beyond it; Clo-oose Beach, circa 1930. Today, there are no remains of this village, but a small amount of boardwalk can be found grown into the twisted roots of the trees in the forest behind it; Grandfather Alfred and Grandmother Ardis on a date chaperoned by his older sisters and their children.

Photo: Courtesy Danielle Baker



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tionally planted by our great-great-grandmother Sarah, perhaps so she could feel more at home or maybe to make home feel more civilized. Either way, this was where we hoped to find the last remaining structure of our family's original homestead, a chimney hand-built by our great-great grandfather David. It was in this house where the whole family took cover under the dining room table when he accidentally lit a fire next to the stump that hid their stash of dynamite. The blast blew the stump up and clear over the house, but the only damage was one broken window.

WHEN OUR great-great grandparents David and Sarah Logan arrived in Victoria from Scotland, in 1894, by way of the United States, they met a man named Mr. Groves. This mysterious character had already established a store and trading post in Clo-oose. He told them he was headed home to Australia for a visit and needed someone to take care of his business while he was away. David and Sarah boarded a steamer that would take them to their permanent, new life, not in the much busier city centre of Victoria but in remote Clo-oose. Unbeknownst to them, Mr. Groves, it turned out, was never to return.

What followed were years of poverty, hard work and a steep learning curve, as they battled incessant rain and floods, were often without supplies because rough seas prevented the steamship from arriving and suffered the loss of a child in infancy. But as R. E. Wells wrote in *There's a Landing Today*—a book about my family's early years as settlers on the coast—this hardship and isolation “created a people resourceful and hardy, co-operative and hospitable, determined and dedicated.” To survive, they worked on the telegraph line that ran from Victoria to Cape Beale, ran a trading post, sold milk from their cattle, played the role of postmaster and justice of the peace and helped to build the Life Saving Road.

Our hearts sink a little when we finally arrive at the bluffs above Clo-oose, the site of the original homestead. Plenty of shapes stand out in the dense bush that could be the chimney, but most are remnants of trees that have been choked out and then completely overtaken by vines. There are no visible traces of the house that once stood with a “grand view in all directions seaward.” We marvel at the return to nature here, when the rest of our lives seem to be surrounded with the loss of it. But then, as if somehow guided, Sarah walks towards one



The Wonderland Trail, Mount Ranier, Washington.

WALK THIS WAY

FROM RAINIER TO RAINFOREST, HERE ARE SIX LEGENDARY NORTH AMERICAN WEST COAST LANDSCAPES WHERE YOU SHOULD TAKE A HIKE.

THE WONDERLAND TRAIL, WA

This famous, 150-kilometre loop is Mount Rainier National Park's A-roll, a Washington wonder that circles an iconic, active volcano, but it's no walk in the park. You'll travel through nearly every type of habitat, from lowland forests to the high alpine, ascending and descending ridges the whole way. Navigating the competitive camping permit system is also required for this strenuous, 10- to 14-day trip.

HIGH DIVIDE LOOP—SEVEN LAKES BASIN, WA

Trek through the heart of Washington's Olympic National Park's old-growth forests on this popular 29-kilometre route south of Lake Crescent. The alpine ridgeline provides direct views of Mount Olympus. Start the clockwise loop on the Sol Duc River Trail. Beware: you are not in the twilight zone; there are actually more than seven lakes. Reservations are required for camping in Seven Lakes Basin.

JUAN DE FUCA, BC

Vancouver Island, British Columbia's rugged, 47-kilometre wilderness hiking trail takes you through Juan de Fuca Provincial Park. It offers endless views of the Olympic Mountains and the stunning coastline along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Be prepared for slippery conditions, tiring sandy sections and the complications of full tide. Work on your bikini tan and fend off foraging black bears at four beachside campsites.

SUNSHINE COAST TRAIL, BC

Billed as Canada's longest hut-to-hut hiking experience, this 180-kilometre trail has it all: coastal shoreline, old-growth forest and high alpine peaks. Take shelter from the storm in any of the 13 free, first-come, first-served huts. With 11 access points, hike any number of shorter stretches before embarking on the big kahuna.

NORTH COAST TRAIL, BC

Bypass the popular 15-kilometre Cape Scott Trail (still a classic) for more challenging misadventures through the coastal, temperate rainforest of Vancouver Island's wild northern coast. The north edge of this 58-kilometre trail is more challenging, while the section that loops around the western side is easier, relatively speaking. Purchase backcountry camping permits online. Leave your dog at home, or the wolves will eat it. Seriously.

PANORAMA RIDGE, BC

Find out what the fuss over the Garibaldi at Squamish, British Columbia's ski-resort development is all about. This 30-kilometre hike offers Garibaldi Provincial Park's most, well, panoramic views. Do it in a day if you're feeling aggro, or take your time to smell the roses and camp by Garibaldi Lake or Taylor Meadows. Risks include blisters, sunburns and navigating the Landover-rich Sea to Sky Highway on a Friday afternoon. —Clare Menzel

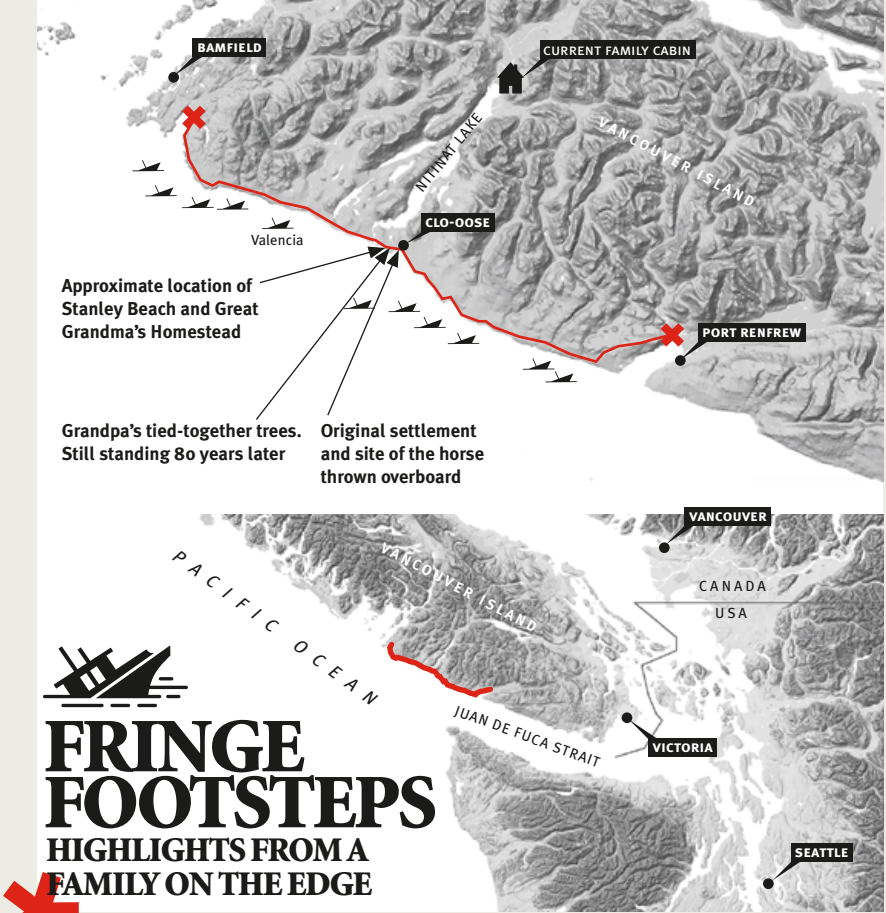
of the looming shapes, pulls back the ivy and, in a casual-yet-grand gesture, reveals the brick chimney Great-great grandfather David Logan had hand-built over 100 years before.

Laying our hands on the brick draws our roots even deeper into this place. It reminds us this is a home we have not truly left. It confirms their sacrifice didn't go unnoticed. It was not wasted. From this place, they created five more generations of resilient West Coast survivors. The land we stand on is where our family overcame their hardships, where shipwreck survivors took refuge and where they developed the love for the wild coast, one we still feel. The way I feel most at peace when exposed face-first to a West Coast storm, complete with raging seas, soaking rain and howling winds, that comes from here. The way my heart beats faster when I can hear the waves crashing just beyond where I'm hiking, because this place is in my blood. It's why, no matter how far I may go, this will always be home.

As we return to Stanley Beach to camp, we pause at the remains of the old house to thank our great-grandmother Maggie—the woman who once shoved a shotgun up the nose of someone who'd forgotten their manners and clubbed a cougar to death on her trapline. We ask her permission to stay. As we climb into our tents that night, there is such a loud chorus of croaking frogs that it nearly drowns out the sound of the ocean only a few metres away. We are lying awake, reliving the day's events in our minds, when suddenly and unexpectedly the frogs stop, as though they have been rudely interrupted. I can't help but think it is our great-grandmother Maggie checking on us. And while it does give me a little shiver, we sleep peacefully and deeply that night, as though we are at home.

Over the next three days, our Grandma Ardis' stories dominate the conversation as we hike north along the trail, crossing the Nitinat Narrows and on to the trail's northern terminus of Bamfield, where my great-grandparents finally moved their family in 1943, and where Sarah and I were raised. Grandma's words and spirit, and those of the generations of pioneers before us, strengthen our bond to this Wild West coast.

For this story, Bamfield-raised, Squamish-based writer Danielle Baker used her grandmother's phantom stories as a map to locate her family's original homestead on the West Coast Trail.



WET-COAST PANORAMA
Top: The West Coast Trail on day two, hiking from Port Renfrew towards Bamfield; navigating these steep and slippery ladders near Tsusiat Falls with a heavy pack can be quite a challenge. The only thing more difficult was probably building them.



Photos: TJ Watt



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