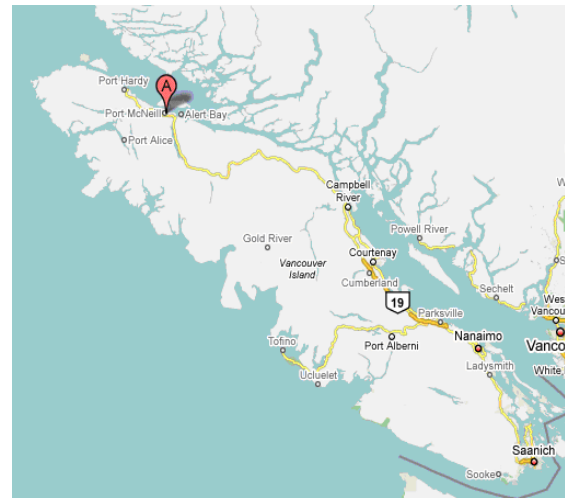


Port McNeill

Port McNeill is located in the Queen Charlotte Strait on the east shore of Vancouver Island. It was named after William Henry McNeill, a captain of the Hudson's Bay steamship the S.S Beaver. The S.S Beaver, was the first steamship on the Pacific Northwest Coast. Port McNeill was a hub for trading between Hudson Bay Co. and the local First Nations. Beaver pelts were abundant as was wood. It is believed that while the *Steamship Beaver* was anchored in the harbour, the crew went ashore to cut firewood. Coal was discovered in the area in 1835. In 1850, the Hudson Bay Company brought miners over from Durham England to mine the coal but the coal was not high quality so the experiment was abandoned. In the 1920s a number of small logging operations were in the area and by the 1930s, McNeill Harbour was beginning to draw the attention of larger forestry companies.

Port McNeill is considered to be the gateway to the Broughton Archipelago as well as the scenic waterways that lead out into the Queen Charlotte Strait and beyond. It is located 2 hours north of Campbell River and four hours from the mainland ferries. Port McNeill is considered to be the centre of North Island logging operations as well as the second largest community on the North Island. It has a population of approximately 2060 people. The economy has been based primarily on natural resources such as forestry, mining, fishing, aquaculture and tourism. It is rich with wildlife viewing (including grizzly bears), whale watching, diving, sea-kayaking as well as a destination point for fresh and saltwater fishing enthusiasts.



GROWTH OF PORT MCNEILL



In the 1930s, larger forestry interests were being attracted by Port McNeill. By 1936, three partners: Storey, Hoy and Chisnall set up camp on the beach. Pioneer Timber Company established a logging camp near the current Port McNeill waterfront in 1937. The camp was floated from Malcolm Island to Port McNeill and included bunk houses which could house 250 men and a few families as well as a cookhouse and washhouse. During the same time, a Japanese logging company subsidiary called N.S McNeil Trading company bought up private land on the West side of Port McNeill and started to log. Two years later, N.S McNeil contracted its logging operations to C&A Logging (owned by Phelan Cyr and Bob Allan). They also established a logging camp that could accommodate 60 loggers as well as some other staff. In 1941, the Canadian Government's Custodian of Alien Property seized the assets and the local timber rights changed hands.

The camp grew, but so did the local services. A poker shack, pool hall, barber shop, community hall (also library and coffee shop) and Guide/Scout Hall were all built. The camp soon transformed from a single man camp to a more family orientated one. In 1954, the one-room school was made into a two-room facility that taught grades 1-8. There was also a gravel baseball and playing field and a swimming pool was constructed in 1957.

Travel used to be mainly by boat or float plane. Residents would shop at the co-op in Sointula or in Alert Bay. In 1951, a water taxi service ran between Beaver Cove, Sointula, Alert Bay and Port McNeill. Port McNeill and Port Hardy were connected by a gravel road in 1959 and the paved road was completed in 1979.

In the 1950s, Empire Development Mining Company started an open pit iron mine at Merry Widow Mountain. In 1961, the Cominco Mining and Smelting Company Ltd. developed a copper mine at Benson Lake. Orca Quarry, jointly owned by Polaris Minerals Corporation and 'Namgis First Nation started commercial production in 2007. The quarry provides sand and gravel to major concrete producers active in residential, commercial and infrastructure construction on the west coast of North America as well as Hawaii.

Forestry continues to be one of the primary resources for the North Island. Over 650 jobs and approximately \$26 million annual income is supplied to the Mt. Waddington Regional District. The District of Port Hardy recently partnered with the Town of Port McNeill and the Village of Port Alice to form the North Island Community Forest Ltd.

BROUGHTON ARCHIPELAGO PROVINCIAL MARINE PARK



The Broughton Archipelago Provincial Park is BC's largest marine park. It is made up of dozens of undeveloped islands and islets on the west side of Queen Charlotte Strait, near the mouth of Knight Inlet. The park was established in 1992 as a result of BC's Protected Areas Strategy and offers a wide variety of ways to explore it from boating to kayaking, diving as well as wildlife viewing. The numerous islands provide sheltered waters and

offers anchorages with magnificent views for boaters. When kayaking or boating in the area it is easy to identify different areas that were used by First Nations. Signs of First Nation use can be seen at some beaches, culturally modified trees, clam terraces (undersea walls built to create habitat for clams) as well as petroglyphs. A rock wall on the north side of Berry Island has a rock formation known as "Chief's Bathtub". This formation is a natural rock basin that fills at high tide. It has been said that a local native chief would bathe in this rock basin that was warmed by hot stones taken from a nearby fire. The area still has signs of European settlements such as overgrown homesteads.



The park is only accessible by water. There is an abundance of wildlife in the area. Several species of marine mammals inhabit the area such as orcas, harbour seals, harbour porpoises, sea lions and sea otters.

FIRST NATIONS

Port McNeill has a strong First Nations influence as it is surrounded by various different First Nations tribes that belong to the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. The Kwakwaka'wakw are the traditional inhabitants of the coastal areas of the northeastern Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia (Canadian Encyclopedia). They are well known for their woodcarving arts and totem pole carvings. The Kwakwaka'wakw use wood in most parts of their lives, they even made their clothing from the bark of trees.

The Kwakwaka'wakw are well known for their carving abilities. Their totem poles and masks often represent creatures from their mythology. The wooden masks were painted and decorated with

feathers and hair and each mask was unique. Some of the masks had moveable parts, such as mouths or beaks, that opened and closed while storytelling.



These masks are called “transformation masks” and they reflect the traditional Kwakwaka’wakw beliefs. In ancient times it was said that the only difference between birds, fish, animals and humans was the skin covering. It was believed that all wild creatures were able

to transform into many different forms. They could also become supernatural beings. When a dancer puts on a mask, it is believed that they are transformed into that being. The Kwakwaka’wakw have four separate spirit realms: sky, sea, earth and otherworldly spirits. All four realms interact with each other and humans attempt to contact them at sacred ceremonies where dancers go into trances while wearing the masks associated with the spirit world.

The Kwakwaka’wakw oral history says that their ancestors came in forms of animals by way of land, sea or underground. When one of these ancestral animals arrived at a given spot, it discarded its animal appearance and became human. Animals that are spoken of include the Thunderbird, his brother Kolus, the seagull, orca, grizzly bear, or chief ghost. Some ancestors have human origins and are said to come from distant places.

When touring the North Island, visitors will be exposed to various different First Nations culture such as the uniquely carved totem poles, gift shops as well as museums in the area. There are a few different First Nations bands in the North Island and they all have a unique history depending on their area. The First Nations history and culture is rich and diverse on the North Island and definitely worth taking the time to explore and learn.



THINGS TO DO IN THE PORT MCNEILL AREA:

Port McNeill is the hub of the North Island for logging operations as well as for outdoor enthusiasts. It's a great place to stay and explore the North Island. There are numerous sites to visit as day trips, weekends or week-long getaways!

- Port McNeill has two of the **largest tree burls** in the world. A tree burl is basically a wart or tumor of a tree. It is made up of a tree's bud tissue that has not sprouted into foliage or grown into a twig. It is a grain characteristic that happens in many types of wood. Burls are often used to make furniture or other household items, even gun stocks. Burls don't



immediately kill trees but they can reduce the tree's health and lifespan. **The Ronning Burl** in Port McNeill is an estimated 30 tons and measures just under 20 feet tall and 20 feet in diameter. It was removed from a Sitka Spruce in 2005 and placed in waterfront park next to downtown Port McNeill. The other giant burl, is also located in Port McNeill, is found next to the Western Forest Product building off SW Main Road, Port McNeill.

- **Port McNeill Heritage Museum** has some interesting artifacts and logging paraphernalia that showcase the history of the area and are all housed in a beautiful log building. The Museum is located on Shelley Crescent.
- **BC Ferries:** this BC Ferry terminal is the connector service to **Alert Bay on Cormorant Island** as well as Sointula on Malcolm Island. Each community can be visited as a day-trip or a weekend getaway. Cormorant Island is one of the oldest settlements on the North Island and is rich in First Nations culture and history. The trip across is 40 min but be sure to check the ferry schedule: <https://www.bcferries.com/routes-fares/schedules>. The Island is only 10 ha in size and can be walked, biked or driven. In addition, it has an impressive amount of local First Nation culture, art as well as areas to explore.
- **Sointula**, a 25 minute ferry ride from Port McNeill, Sointula began as a Utopian colony in the early 1900s started by a playwright named Matti Kurikka. Finnish for "*harmony*" he led disgruntled Finnish coal miners from Nanaimo to Malcolm Island to start a Utopian colony. The dream of a Utopian colony was to live in a place or state where everything ran perfectly and peacefully. The struggle was hard and the colony faced increasing financial hardships despite the hard work of the local community. In 1904, after a tragic

fire, the land was returned to the government in return for a loan to repay the colony's creditors. The Utopian lifestyle did not survive, however, the Finnish language still remains and independence-seekers still arrive in Sointula looking for a slower paced life. Fishing is still the mainstay of the Sointula economy but tourism is quickly gaining popularity as travellers seek fresh air, outdoor fishing and whale watching to name a few. **The Co-op Store**, located in downtown Sointula, was founded in 1909 and is BC's longest running cooperative general store. Malcolm Island is dotted with colorfully painted houses, tidy-fenced gardens, an interactive museum, a working forge, cemetery,



hardware store, bakery and a beautiful harbour. The **Sointula Museum** can be found near the old school and the public library. For a small island, the museum is quite large and has a vast amount of photos, books, fishing and logging tools as well as antiques used by the first immigrants to the Island. **Dunroven Farm and Forge** is a chance to sample living history. A quaint B&B, every guest

is given the opportunity to learn the basic steps in blacksmithing and earn a diploma once completed. **Bere Point Trail**, located 6 km from Sointula is a public campground with picnic facilities for use. The Trail is a 10-km round trip that leads you to a viewing platform above a pebbled beach. The viewing platform is the closest access point to the orca rubbing beach. Other hikes in the area are the 6-km **Mateoja Heritage Trail** that starts on Third Street, meanders through marshland, passes by an early homestead and has an option to wind around to the manned lighthouse. The 3-km **Kaleva Road Walkway**, is an



interpretive nature walk along the seaside to Mitchell Bay Road. There are various different **B&B's** that one can stay at or you can opt to spend the day biking around the island and head back to Port McNeill on the last ferry.

- **Boating: Port McNeill Harbour** is open year round with room for both commercial and pleasure boats of all sizes. The area has become a major re-supply point for travellers up and down the coast.
- An excellent base for day trips to the **Nimpkish Valley, Port Alice, Port Hardy, Zeballos** and **Telegraph Cove**, Port McNeill has a variety of shops, restaurants and B&Bs for those wanting to explore in a relaxed setting.

- **Telegraph Cove** is small cove off Johnston Strait located approximately 20 min south of



Port McNeill. It's a perfect access point to the **Broughton Archipelago** as well as **Robson Bight** where the orcas rub on the beaches. A spectacular way to spend a day or week kayaking and exploring the area. Telegraph Cove has **kayak day trips** available to visitors. It's considered a perfect home base where you can stay in your RV or in the Marina and explore the area at your leisure. With only 20 year-round residents, Telegraph Cove is a perfect

way to step back into time and unwind.

- **Whale watching, fishing and kayaking** are extremely popular day activities in the Port



McNeill area. Guests would have opportunities to view orcas, humpback whales, minke, porpoises, sea lions as well as other marine and wildlife in the area. **Whale watching** is an incredible way to spend the day. **Salmon fishing** as well as **bottom-fishing** can be done almost year round in the Strait. There are numerous

fishing charters in the area that have years of experience and would make the fishing experience an enjoyable one. If a slower pace was what you were looking for, there are plenty saltwater as well as freshwater areas to kayak in the area. It's always best to check with the locals or even hire a guide to ensure that your trip is safe and memorable. The

Robson Bight (Michael Biggs) Ecological Reserve, home to the **Orca Rubbing Beaches** is a sanctuary for the Orca and was established in 1982. Access by land or boat is prohibited. The total area of the Reserve is 5,460 hectares and was proclaimed as the best place in BC to see Orcas in the wild. The protected habitat provides



sanctuary for the Killer Whales, and an abundant food source during the summer salmon run. It's estimated that over half of BC's salmon pass through this area en route to the Fraser River. The Orcas come to this beach (known as **Rubbing Beach**) to play and rub the barnacles off their bodies. When in the area, boaters (including kayaker's) must observe the boundaries to ensure that they paddle past the area and not enter the reserve.