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**Maps  
Inside!!**

The Official Guide:

# The Galloping Goose Regional Trail

By Jim Mulchinock



**W**elcome to the Galloping Goose Regional Trail. The Goose is your trail. You can cycle, walk, run, jog, in-line skate, wheelchair, push a stroller, walk the dog, ride a horse, commute to work, spend a quiet Sunday afternoon, push yourself through the entire trail, or take a 15 minute break on this multi-use, 57 kilometre former railway line, now a regional trail. If it isn't a motorized vehicle, you can do it on the Goose.

The Goose also knows every landscape on southern Vancouver Island. You can travel past the finest: a quiet cove, a hidden lake, rocky outcrops, marshland, canyon land,

skunk cabbage swampland, tall Douglas fir forest, Garry oak and arbutus forest, rural farmland, urban back streets, and waterways. This is the Capital Regional District at its best.

From start to finish, from east to west, here's a rundown on the Goose.

## **Selkirk Trestle to Switch Bridge**

The Galloping Goose Regional Trail begins here at the Selkirk Trestle. However, trailside kilometre markers are measured from the Johnson Street bridge — to account for future expansion of the trail linking downtown Victoria about one kilometre to the south.

The Selkirk Trestle — a 300-metre long, fir and hemlock trestle — spans the Selkirk Waters, a bulge in the narrow saltwater inlet curving north-west from Victoria's Inner Harbour to the Gorge and Portage inlets. Though signs of a changing downtown Victoria dominate the southern view, the immediate environs are mostly tranquil, with lush poplars, willows and maples pushing to the shoreline and softening the urban landscape.

### Spanning the Water

When the Selkirk Trestle opened in 1996, an important milestone was achieved in the history of the Galloping Goose Regional Trail: a continuous multi-use trail now linked the communities of Victoria West and Saanich. Severely damaged in a fire in 1995, the trestle was rebuilt, including a hand-winched, counter-weight driven draw bridge to allow boats with tall masts to navigate the inner waters.

The trestle itself is five metres wide — ample room for the hundreds of strollers and cyclists on a Sunday afternoon outing. There's even room for the occasional fisher casting over the railing for herring.

**T**hough the trestle is wide, the surface can get slippery after wet weather. If you're on wheels, check your speed and watch out for other trail users. You can access the bridge at either end: from the south, take Tye Road to Arthur Currie Lane; from the north, drop down from Gorge Road East, a block west of Jutland Road.

From the bridge, in rapid succession, the trail scurries under the Gorge Road East bridge and the Burnside Road East bridge. A huge mural brightens up one of the massive, cast concrete bridges. The Goose emerges into the warehouse and light industry district just west of Douglas Street. It's stop-and-go here. The trail crosses six urban roads in a row. At many of them, you must yield to road traffic, so stay alert. Up ahead: the Switch Bridge.

The Switch Bridge, a 100 metre span across the Trans-Canada Highway, marks another important milestone in the life of the Goose. Until the

Switch Bridge, the busy highway blocked flow along the Goose. When the bridge opened in 1996, the Goose gained easy, uninterrupted access to Victoria.

### Switch Bridge to Quadra Street — The Saanich Spur

At the north end of the Switch Bridge, the trail forks. The right fork bends north-east and becomes the Saanich spur (2.3 km in length) of the Goose. Again, it quickly ducks under two major bridges: this time at Blanshard Street and Vernon Avenue.

You're now in the heart of Saanich, the CRD's largest municipality with a population of 105,000. The Goose skirts around the southern perimeter of Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary — a great opportunity for a side trip (sorry, no bicycles) if you're on foot. The verdant willows and hints of marsh wildlife beckon the asphalt traveler to explore further.



With Swan Lake to the north, the trail crosses over the Brett Avenue Trestle and 500 metres beyond, the Swan Lake Trestle, both remnants of the former Canadian Northern Pacific Railway (and later the CNR)

line that ran through Saanich from 1917 to 1990.

Just past the Swan Lake Trestle, at Quadra Street, the Galloping Goose abruptly ends — for now. Future plans include expansion of the Goose into a regional trail system that continues up Lochside Drive and on to Sidney.

### **Switch Bridge to Atkins Avenue**

Back at the Switch Bridge, the left fork heads west towards the Western Communities and points beyond. Recent completion of the Interurban Road bridge, the Wilkinson Road bridge, and the Helmcken underpass has made life easier for anyone commuting to work and cycling to and from the Western Communities. Travel is straight and no-nonsense. The Trans-Canada Highway is a constant companion to the south for the next five kilometres. To the north, Scotch broom and the backyards of suburban Saanich complete the vistas and hurry the commuting cyclist along.

Closer to View Royal you'll catch a glimpse of Portage Inlet to the south, glass-like on a quiet day, the terminus of a saltwater inlet that began way back in Victoria Harbour. This section of the trail dips and winds its way into View Royal.

At last, the Atkins Avenue parking lot. Shortly beyond here, say goodbye to the paved, asphalt Goose; hello to the compacted, former rail-bed and with it a subtle change in the Goose's character. The trail sheds its urban backyard-and-sidestreet clothes and goes rural and rough. Well, rough enough for most of us. It's still a nice family journey. You just have to pay attention to bumps in the track, the odd overhanging branch, and the occasional mud puddle.

### **A lake for all seasons**

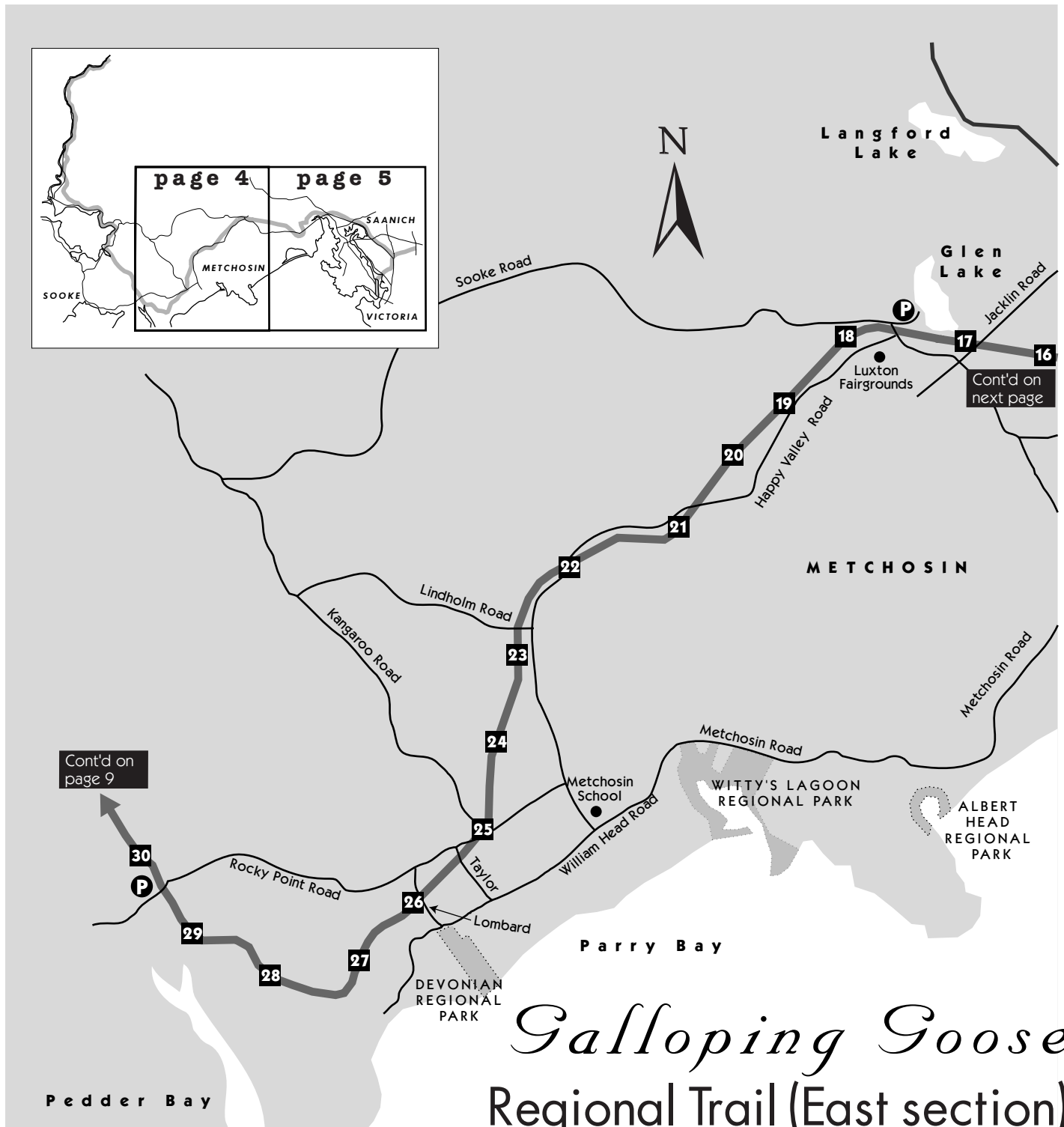
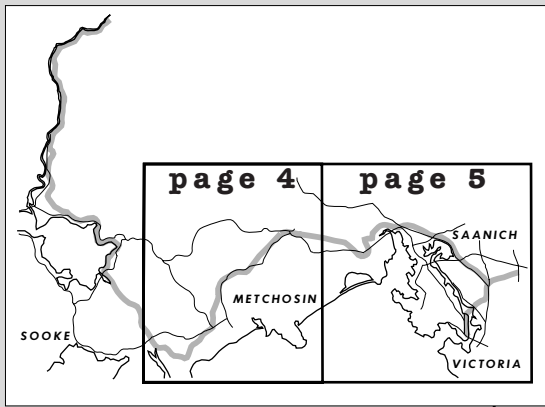
The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is worth a trip on its own. The 58 hectare sanctuary protects the marshy lowlands around Swan Lake and the high, rocky Garry oak outcrops of nearby Christmas Hill. You can spend an easy half day here strolling along trails (including a floating boardwalk) and watching elusive birds, muskrat, river otter and mink. The Nature House fills out the trip with exhibits and a reading room. The Sanctuary also offers guided events for groups. Phone (250) 479-0211 for more information.

### **Atkins Avenue to Metchosin**

Just west of the Atkins Avenue parking lot, the Goose crosses Six Mile Road. For those with more time to explore, visit nearby Thetis Lake Regional Park, a popular 635 hectare park with a variety of activities from swimming at a beach to nature study in a Douglas fir forest. Take the side path down to Six Mile Road, turn right (north) and follow Six Mile for about a kilometre to the main gate. If you're cycling, some of the Thetis Lake trails are accessible to mountain bikes. Bicycle racks are available.

**F**or the next seven kilometres the Goose rides over top of the Colwood Delta — an immense pile of gravel, up to 100 metres thick, underlying much of Langford and Colwood. It was built nearly 13,000 years ago by streams flowing to the sea from glacial ice west of Langford Lake. You can't see the delta as such (it's under foot) but you can see some of the left over meltwater channels and ponds.

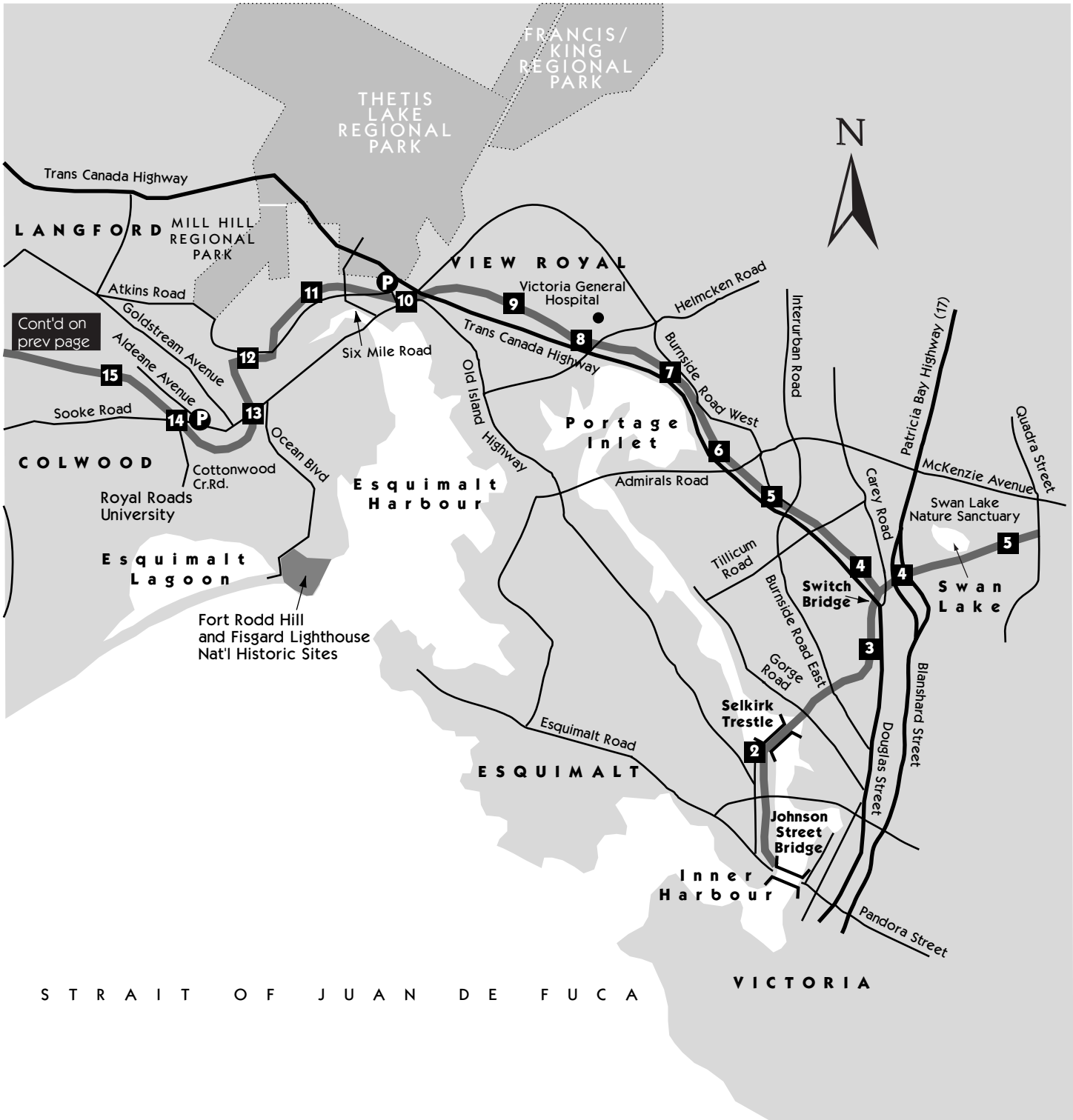
Road crossings interrupt the flow of the Goose all the way to the Luxton



# *Galloping Goose* Regional Trail (East section)

Fairgrounds. The Goose crosses Atkins Avenue (three times), Sooke Road (three times), Jacklin Road and a few other smaller roads. Sooke and Jacklin are busy, major roads. Exercise caution when crossing. Use the cross walks and if you're cycling, dismount before crossing.

The working landscape of Colwood and Langford is partially shielded by fern-laden rocky outcrops, pasture land, and low-lying wetlands. It's a delightful surprise to enter a shady former railway cutbank on a hot summer day and imagine the rickety Galloping Goose gas car (circa 1930) lurching along the old rail line.



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S T R A I T   O F   J U A N   D E   F U C A



**Legend:**

- Galloping Goose Regional Trail
- Distance (km) from Johnson St. Bridge

Speaking of history, cyclists and strong walkers can visit Fort Rodd Hill and Fisgard Lighthouse National Historic Sites a short distance from the Goose. The story of coastal defense and maritime navigation are



the themes of these two historic sites. At the first Island Highway crossing, proceed to the east side of the highway and leaving the Goose, walk north a short distance on the sidewalk to Ocean Boulevard. Fort Rodd Hill lies a little over a kilometre down Ocean Blvd. Watch for signs directing you to the site. You can lock your bicycle to the wrought iron fence near the site entrance.

### **Ridin' the Goose**

Gas car No. 15813 was gawky and noisy. But the Galloping Goose motored past some of the finest landscapes on the Vancouver Island: fern-draped rock cuts, streams, and rolling hills. From its first run in 1922, the Goose carried mail and 30 passengers twice daily from Victoria to Sooke. The CNR dropped the Goose after a brief nine year run. Heavier freights worked the Cowichan line for another 30 years, hauling logs and supplies between towns west of Victoria.

For more information, phone (250) 478-5849.

While you're in the neighbourhood, you can take a short side trip to the campus of Royal Roads University. Highlights there include a real castle (Hatley Castle), historic tours, native and exotic garden tours, walking trails and more. Royal Roads can be reached from the Goose at the junction of Aldeane Road and Sooke Road. Phone (250) 391-2511 for more information.

### **Metchosin**

Just west of Glen Lake and Jacklin Road, the Goose swings south and leaves Langford behind, entering Metchosin, one of the earliest pioneering communities on Vancouver Island. For about seven kilometres, the trail loosely parallels Happy Valley Road, crossing it twice before veering west towards Rocky Point Road at Kangaroo Road.

Where the Goose in the eastern urban sections is used primarily by commuters and neighbourhood strollers, the Metchosin section is a destination of choice. It's easy to see why. The rural pasture lands, small farms surrounded by hills, lazy creeks, and arbutus-clad outcrops remind users of a day gone-by — when life was simpler and slower and closer to nature.

**I**n 1871, one of the first public schools in Western Canada opened here. The Metchosin School still stands near the corner of Happy Valley and William Head roads, only a short 1½ kilometres from the Goose.

If you're on a mountain bike, the kilometres seem to flow under your wheels. If you're planning to cycle only one section of the Goose, the Metchosin section would be an excellent choice. Park along any road in Metchosin (please respect private

property). Or better still, begin your outing at the parking lot at Roche Cove Regional Park or a second one 500 metres south of Malloch Road along Rocky Point Road (see map). From either point you can head west towards the Sooke Basin or east into the heart of Metchosin.

For those interested in a longer side trip, Witty's Lagoon Regional Park lies only four kilometres from the Goose. This 56 hectare park features spectacular sandy beach, rocky headlands, and sheltered lagoon, and offers year-round birdwatching and five kilometres of trails. To reach Witty's from the Kangaroo/Rocky Point roads junction, ride north-east along Rocky Point Road, turn right on Happy Valley Road, then left on Metchosin Road. The park and the Nature Information Centre are another two kilometres ahead on your right. While cycling is not permitted in the park, bicycle racks are available at the main entrance.

### **Roche Cove and Sooke Basin**

From the parking lot off Rocky Point Road, the Goose heads straight into Matheson Lake and Roche Cove regional parks. The Goose changes character again. From the pastoral setting of Metchosin, the trail crosses into semi-wilderness. The trail surface is still hard packed and comfortable, of course, but the scenery gets wilder and greener. Pockets of Western Red Cedar, low lying skunk cabbage swamp, glimpses of Matheson Lake and Roche Cove, and creeks emerging from fern forests reward the traveller.

If you have the time, you'll be tempted by the few short side trips off into the heart of both parks. You can stop for lunch just off the trail at Matheson Lake and walk down to the lake itself. Sorry, no bicycles allowed. Or you can wait and stop further on to explore Roche Cove

Regional Park along the Cedar Grove Trail (2½ km), the Matheson Creek Trail (2 km) or even a short walk

### **Watch for construction!**

The Goose connects seven communities in the Capital Regional District. Unlike most regional parklands, it crosses through working neighbourhoods and urban landscapes. Therefore, expect to see the occasional construction zone where work crews go about day-to-day road and sewer maintenance. Usually detours are well-marked. Current updates are posted on 474-PARK.

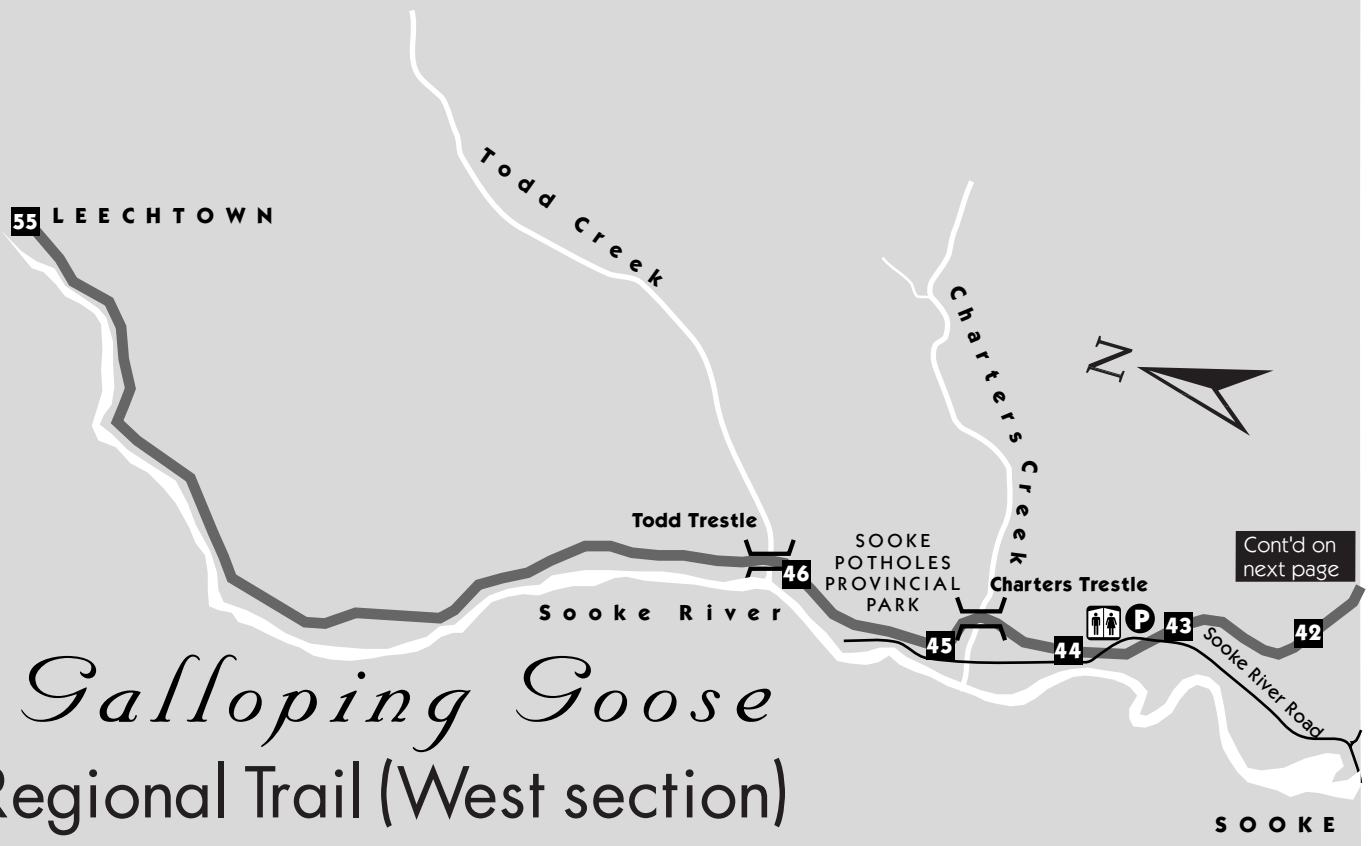
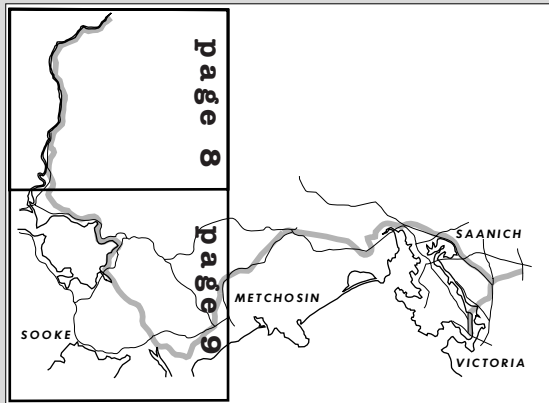
down to the cove itself (100 metres). Roche Cove is worth getting to know.

Heading west past Roche Cove, the trail crosses Gillespie Road (use extreme caution: a blind curve in the road) and skirts Sooke Basin, clinging to the coves and headlands along the north shore to the small peninsula of Milnes Landing.

Savour this section of the Goose. There are few multi-use trails along the west coast that offer cycling this close to the Pacific Ocean. The trail dips steeply down into Veitch Creek near Hutchison Cove. Most cyclists hustle quickly over the bridge and climb up the other side. But they miss one of the gems of the Goose. Stop on the side of the bridge and enjoy the spectacular view of Veitch Creek as it flows over exposed bed-rock and out into the basin.

### **Sooke River Valley**

Near Coopers Cove (3 km west of Roche Cove) the Goose heads north across Sooke Road (use extreme caution on this busy highway!) and visits the neighbourhood of Ayum

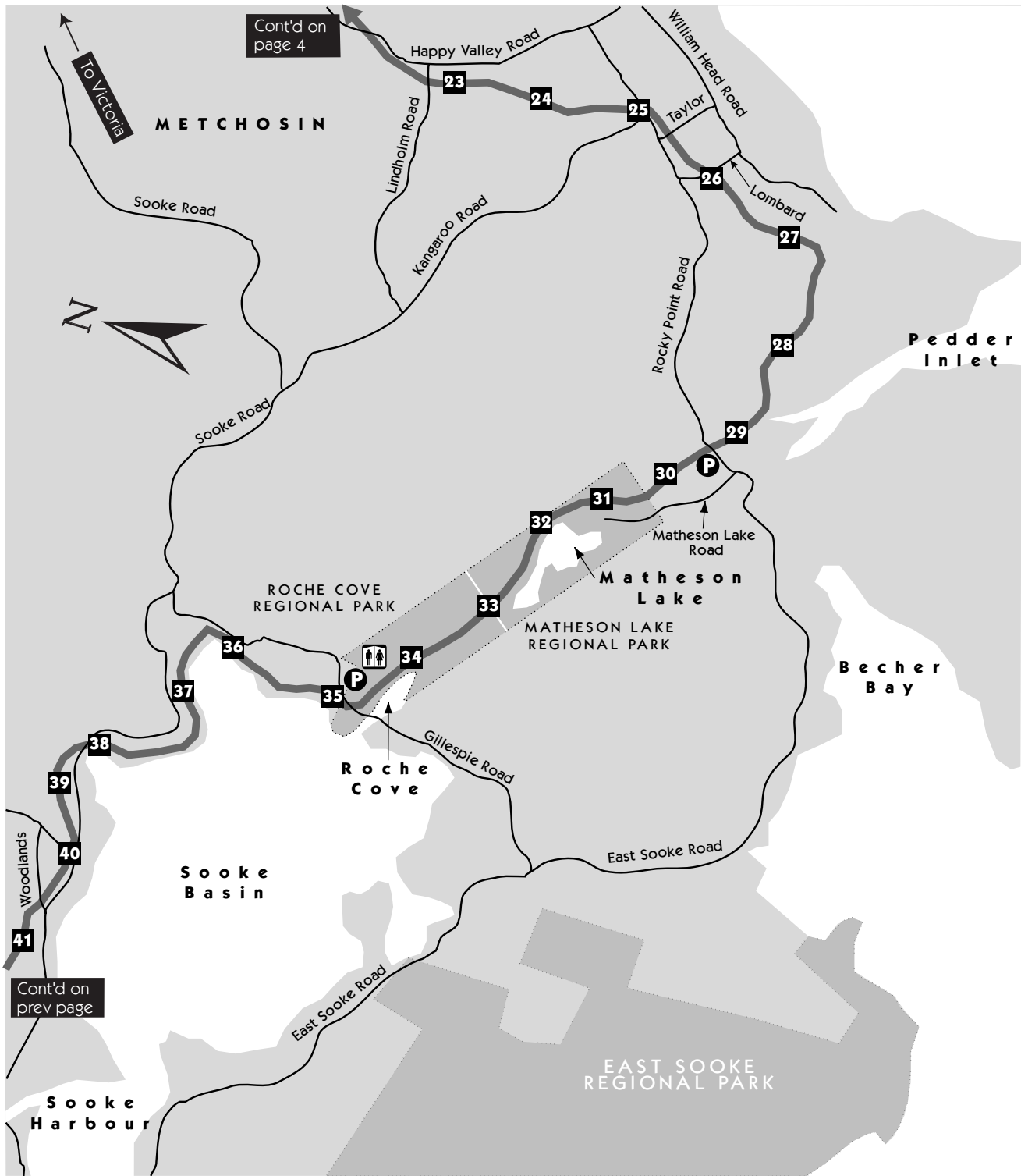


# *Galloping Goose* Regional Trail (West section)

Creek before heading north into the Sooke River Valley.

Here the Goose climbs out of the coastal plain and up the canyon. Far below, the Sooke River plunges and swirls past potholes, and hustles out to sea. The original railway once spanned Charters and Todd creeks.

Today only tall iron and wooden trestles remain, upgraded in 1995 to safely handle foot and bicycle use. The view from the trail perched on the side of the canyon is breathtaking. If you're on horseback, watch for signs indicating a bypass trail with stream crossing for horses.



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To Victoria



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**Legend:**

- Galloping Goose Regional Trail
- 41** Distance (km) from Johnson St. Bridge



There is no direct access to Sooke Potholes Provincial Park from here as the Goose is separated from the Potholes by private property. We recommend entering from the Sooke River parking lot, about 2½ kilometres south of the Potholes on Sooke River Road.

From the last trestle over Todd Creek, the Goose climbs steadily for 12 kilometres to the end of the trail near Leechtown. Most trail users end their journey near the Todd Trestle, but the ambitious cyclist may want to complete the last section.

This last stretch is straight and narrow because of trees and shrubs

### **A larger vision!**

The Galloping Goose Regional Trail is part of something bigger: the Trans-Canada Trail, a national multi-use trail system linking similar trails from coast to coast to coast. As one of the first completed sections of the Trans-Canada Trail, the Goose is also part of the CRD Regional Trail system that will some day link Swartz Bay and Port Renfrew.

encroaching on the right-of-way. It is indeed wild, but the least scenically interesting of the previous 25 kilometres.

Leechtown, an old mining town, lies on private land beyond the regional trail. Those expecting to view a quaint, ghost town will be disappointed. Though rich in history, much of Leechtown has disappeared, either overgrown with Scotch Broom or dismantled long ago.

You don't have to complete the entire trail in one day. It is possible — but only for the strongest cyclists. Most users plan on enjoying the Goose in sections: half to full-day trips in Metchosin, Roche Cove Regional Park, or along the Sooke River. Elsewhere, the Goose is ideal for commuting and short outings in a natural setting. Either way, the trail is yours to enjoy and yours to protect.

### **What to expect:**

The Goose through Victoria, Saanich, and parts of View Royal (to Atkins Avenue) is paved asphalt — smooth traveling for wheeled or walking traffic. This section is open to all users except horse riders. The Goose west of Atkins Avenue in Langford is unpaved and ideal for mountain bikes and horses (we don't recommend street bicycles, in-line skates, or wheelchairs). The trail surface is wide (two to five metres) and mostly flat, except where it dips down into stream beds and a few road crossings.

**I**f you're planning a day outing on horseback, a convenient place to park your horse trailer is the Luxton Fairgrounds off (south side) Sooke Road just west of the turnoff to Happy Valley Road. From there you can head south on the Goose into Metchosin and East Sooke.

### **Trail etiquette**

The watch word for the Goose is multi-use! Share the trail. Keep right, pass on the left. If you stop, move off to the right side. Motorized vehicles are prohibited (except for motorized wheelchairs). Respect private property adjacent to the trail.

- If you're on foot or on wheels, pass horseback riders with caution — horses can spook at startling noises or motions.
- If you're on horseback, let other trail users know when your horse is safe to pass.
- If you're cycling or in-line skating, yield to pedestrians, control your speed, and announce yourself before passing other trail users, e.g. "On your left."
- If you're walking your dog, keep it under control, along the right-hand shoulder of the trail, and on a short leash. And remember, you must pick up your dog's droppings.

If you're planning a lengthy bicycle outing or are arriving from Vancouver or the Gulf Islands, you may be interested in using public bus transportation (BC Transit). Low floor buses on Routes 50, 52, 61, 70, and 75 are equipped with bike-racks. Those routes provide service to the Western Communities, Sooke, Central Saanich, and Swartz Bay. Phone (250) 385-2551 for more details.

Estimating general travel times is a tricky business on the Goose, with so

many different modes of travel, relative speeds, and user fitness levels. The easiest way to gauge your travel time is to consult the accompanying maps, refer to the kilometre markers, estimate your own rate of travel, and arrive at a travel time. Allow for rest stops, lunch breaks, and sight seeing.

### **In case of Emergency, dial 9-1-1.**

If you observe unlawful activities, or need to report a medical emergency, a fire, or any other emergency, dial 9-1-1. (Dec 31/98)

*(Jim Mulchinock is the Information Coordinator for CRD Parks.)*



Capital Regional District

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