

12

THREE PEAKS

(Anderson Hill Park, Walbran Park & Gonzales Hill Regional Park)

I call this the Three Peaks walk because it takes us up and over three attractive hills tucked away in the southern end of Oak Bay. Situated between Gonzales and McNeill Bays this spectacular piece of land originally belonged to the Ross family back in the 1840s. It was later subdivided into small lots where wealthy Victorians built their summer cottages. Today, although crammed with tasteful family homes — most with superb ocean views — the area includes three small pockets of land preserved for us all as parks: Gonzales Hill Regional Park, Walbran Park and Anderson Hill Park.

Gonzales Hill, at over 70 metres above sea level, was chosen by the federal government in 1914 as an ideal site for a weather station and observatory. Originally manned it is now fully automated and comprises part of the small

regional district park which bears its name.

Walbran Park was named after Captain John Walbran, the author of British Columbia Coast Names. The cairn, or as the locals refer to it, "the pike", at the top of Walbran was erected as a monument to the British, Spanish and American explorers of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Locally referred to as Blueberry Hill, Anderson Hill Park was named for the nineteenth century explorer, agriculturist, artist and Victoria's first postmaster, Alexander Caulfield Anderson. The Oak Bay municipality purchased the 2.55-hectare piece of land in 1974 and created the park in 1979.

All three of these "peaks" are striking examples of what Victoria has to offer its residents and visitors in the form of high rocky outcrops with outstanding views of city, coast, islands and mountains.

General description A hilly walk encompassing three high-level city peaks with magnificent views. Not for those who dislike steps — 120 of them.

Location On the border of the municipalities of Victoria and Oak Bay at the southern tip of the Victoria peninsula.

Length 1.5–2 hours

Level Moderate to strenuous

Start Roadside parking on Beach Drive at McNeill Bay between St. Patrick Street and Transit Road.

Highlights Gonzales weather station known as the "Observatory"; views south and west; wonderful spot to see the sunset; Walbran cairn — a monument to exploration with 360-degree views; Anderson Hill Park — a small park with big views.



Gonzales Hill observatory and weather station.

JEFF GEORGE

How to get there Leave town on Fort Street turning **R** on Cook Street. Follow Cook to Fairfield Road and turn **L**. Take Fairfield for about two kilometres where it

becomes Beach Drive. Continue on Beach and, 500 metres after it turns **L** to follow McNeill Bay, park on the ocean side between St. Patrick Street and Transit Road.

THE WALK

- ① From the intersection of Beach Drive and Transit Road walk up Transit on its **R** side.
- ② After about 50 metres turn **R** onto a short trail with stairs. This trail quickly forks. Take the **R** fork.
- ③ This rough trail twists through bushes, trees and between houses until it enters Anderson Hill Park via a grove of stunted and windswept Garry oaks. The trail then opens onto a large grass and rock promontory.
- ④ The promontory's summit has benches, gorse bushes and grand views of ocean and mountains. Trial Island sits just below in the deepening waters of McNeill Bay (once known as Shoal Bay). Return from the summit along a chip trail to the wooden gateway to the park.
- ⑤ Turn **L** onto Island Road.
- ⑥ After 100 metres or so, turn **L** down a lane between two houses (and opposite houses 597 and 627). This lane becomes a trail leading down to Transit Road (checkpoint ②). Turn **L** onto Transit.
- ⑦ Turn **R** onto Beach Drive.
- ⑧ As Beach turns sharply **R** you turn **L** onto King George Terrace crossing to its **R** side. After 50 metres cross Sunny Lane and immediately take the flight of stairs signed "Pathway to Walbran Park." This stairway rises 70 metres via 120 steps to the cairn and bunker of Walbran Park.
- ⑨ At the stairway's top you'll see the bunker across the road (Denison Road). The cairn is up to your **R** about 20 metres past the stairs. Both these landmarks give unimpeded and spectacular 360-degree views of the city, ocean and mountains.
- ⑩ After visiting the bunker and the cairn turn **R** onto Denison Road and walk the 200 metres to the carpark of Gonzales Hill Regional Park.



- ⑪ Turn **L** into the park's carpark and, at its **L** corner, follow the path to the white observatory building. Walk to the **L** of the observatory and, after taking in the wonderful views (from 70 metres above sea-level), descend the rocky path to Barkley Terrace.
- ⑫ Turn **L** onto Barkley Terrace.
- ⑬ Turn **L** onto King George Terrace, cross the road and walk up to the terrace's Trafalgar Park lookout.
- ⑭ Directly below the lookout is Harling Point and the Chinese Cemetery. To the **L** are Trial Island and the crescent of McNeill Bay.
- ⑮ Descend the terrace and turn **R** onto Beach Drive walking back to the route's start.