Rising up from the ocean, the emerald green ancient forests of Meares Island form the backdrop of the tourist and fishing town of Tofino, BC, Canada. Situated in the heart of Clayoquot (pronounced “Klak-wot”) Sound, Tofino is on the west coast of Vancouver Island and is where the Trans Canada Highway hits the wide-open Pacific Ocean. As anyone who has visited Clayoquot Sound knows, this place is a symphony of nature connected to the rest of Canada by a ribbon of blacktop.

To fend off impending logging plans, Meares Island was first designated a “Tribal Park” on April 21, 1984 by the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations, supported by its neighbours, the Ahousaht First Nations. Meares Island’s 8,500 hectares of spectacular ancient forests make this tribal park a favourite with west coast visitors.

A short trip by traditional dugout canoe, sea kayak or water taxi from one of Tofino’s waterfront docks can transport you to the amazing world found on Meares. Imagine seeing red cedar trees almost 20 metres in circumference. That’s a tree as wide as a living room! Imagine hiking on a winding boardwalk through this forest of giant trees and lush west coast jungle plants like licorice fern, salal, salmon berry and sword fern. Or go with a guide to learn about the traditional uses of these forest plants and about the area’s rich history.

Tla-o-qui-aht territory encompasses Tofino and its surroundings. The Tla-o-qui-aht have been living in Clayoquot Sound since time immemorial. Opitsat, the Tla-o-qui-aht village on Meares Island is located in the same spot as traders from Britain and the USA noted in the late 1700s.

The Tla-o-qui-aht have been welcoming visitors from around the world ever since those first encounters, though it’s not always been easy living in such a busy crossroads of cultures. From the battle that sank the merchant ship ‘Tonquin’ in 1811 within site of Meares Island, to the protests and court battle over logging giant MacMillan Bloedel’s plans to clearcut log Meares in 1984, Clayoquot Sound has seen its share of conflict. But mostly Clayoquot Sound is remembered as welcoming, wild and wonderful! These are the main reasons that Clayoquot Sound is such a popular getaway destination today. If you are fortunate enough to visit Tofino and the surrounding Clayoquot Sound area, be sure to cross that narrow strip of water to the Meares Island Tribal Park. You’ll witness its amazing legacy and make memories to last a lifetime!
First Nations filed proceedings to prevent MacMillan Bloedel from logging Meares, basing their argument on aboriginal ownership of the island. At Opitsat, a community of the Tla-o-qui-aht people located at the southwestern end of Meares Island, the depth of the shell midden attests to over 5,000 years of continuous occupancy. Meares was never occupied by “outsiders” and its ownership was never ceded to the Canadian government.

Eventually the Tla-o-qui-aht and Ahousaht First Nations prevailed in court, and were successful in their efforts to protect their garden: Meares Island. The MacMillan Bloedel logging crew never returned.


Left: 1984 Save Meares Island protest at Legislature (Wilderness Committee files). Right: Big tree trail on Meares Island. (Wilderness Committee Map)
LAW SHOULD COME FROM NATURE

T o us, the Tla-o-qui-aht people represent our constitution, and how our rights and responsibilities are based on natural laws. They help us affirm our community as not merely natural laws. They help us affirm that communities are not merely individuals, but are also rights-holders. That communities are not merely natural laws. They help us affirm that the world is a living system that is imbued with intrinsic value and deserves great respect.

Second law forms the base of each totem in our tradition, and that is the Wolf, which is responsible for upholding the natural laws, and is seen as one of the most important crests. Another common crest depicted in our tradition is the Raven. It reminds us of all the creatures that fly and walk in the world, and the laws of nature we all live and die under. This includes humans because when we live together we have to learn how to walk together. This law is also present in the concept Quu-us, which means, “Real live human beings”. As Quu-us, we are a link between past and future ancestors, and have inherited all of the medicines that sustain life both physically and spiritually. As a link we are responsible for passing our inherited medicines onto future ancestors, and are accountable to them and all living beings through the laws of nature and our communities’ laws. These teachings about inter-generational accountability forms the human point of reference to the teaching of Quay-qwiik-sup, which is about landscapes and “life-scapes” in a state of transformation. Quay-qwiik-sup speaks to the connectivity through time and the gratitude and responsibility to our past and future ancestors. The current challenge we face is to apply these laws and teachings in a meaningful way to the day-to-day governance of our traditional territory including sub-watersheds and communities.

One of the tools we have developed to meet this challenge is Tribal Parks. Tribal Parks are indigenous watershed management areas designed to reflect a more integrated understanding of human spirituality, human economy and healthy functioning ecosystems. Tribal Parks aim to meet our long-term accountability to future ancestors while also creating sustainable livelihoods for today’s generation. Furthermore, Tribal Parks experiences are designed to transfer ancestral knowledge to visitors traveling from around the world with the goal of furthering global stewardship initiatives. —Joe Martin and El Enns, Tla-o-qui-aht (Indigenous peoples of Clayoquot Sound)

Here are a few listings of some folks that can make your Vancouver Island adventure come alive! For a more complete list see Tourism Tofino (tourismtofino.com)

Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks
The friendly folks that manage the Meares Island and Ha’uukmin Tribal Parks. Ph: (250) 725-3233 tribalparks@tla-o-qui-aht.org www.tropicalparks.ca WestCoast Wild Adventures Ltd. Come see the Ha’uukmin Tribal Park with Zip Line and River Kayaking Eco-Educational Tours. Ph: (250) 726-8668 Email: info@wcwild.com www.wcwild.com


Best Western Tin-Wis Resort Located 3 km outside of Tofino, in the beautiful and pristine heart of Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island, BC. Positioned on the traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations. 1119 Pacific Rim Highway Tofino, BC, V0R 2K0 Ph: (250) 725-4445 Toll Free: 1-800-661-9995 Email: info@tinwis.com www.tinwis.com

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT!

Contact Premier Campbell, and let him know how you feel about having Meares Island become legally protected from industrial logging for all time.

Hon. Gordon Campbell, Premier of BC West Annex, Parliament Buildings Victoria, BC. V8Y 1X4 Phone: 250-387-1715 Fax: 250-387-0087 Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

If I support the TLA-O-QUI-AHT FIRST NATIONS’ TRIBAL PARK!

Here is my donation towards the Tla-o-qui-aht Meares Island Tribal Park initiative.

Enclosed is: $25 $50 $100 Other $ ………. 

Enclosed: ………. 

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Credits