

Where Rivers, Mountains and People Meet: The Essential Geography of The Sea to Sky Corridor

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Abstract:

The Sea To Sky corridor is an intensely scenic coastal region in southwest British Columbia between Vancouver and Pemberton and is renowned not only for its breathtaking landscapes but also for its rich cultural tapestry. The area is also a place of deep cultural resonance, aptly described by the Lil'wat people as "where rivers, mountains, and people meet." With The Essential Geography of the Sea To Sky, I set out to do more than simply chart these features on paper. This perspective highlights the intimate and intrinsic connection between the natural environment and human experience, an aspect that is central to the map's design. By including both Indigenous and colonial place names, the map not only serves as a functional reference tool but also as a medium for cultural education and reconciliation. It reflects the longstanding presence and sovereignty of the Squamish and Lil'wat nations in the region, narrating history and inscribing the landscape with profound meaning. The map also seeks to foster geographic awareness and appreciation for the unique and diverse ecosystems of the Howe Sound area, recently recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Region.

Modern mapping techniques play a central role in capturing this vast terrain, from the corridor's steep slopes and forested valleys to the glacier-fed waters to highlight the land's natural beauty. The shaded relief was rendered using Blender, an open-source surface modelling tool (often over-used lately), to produce a wonderful, 3D looking landscape. In this case, a slightly exaggerated relief is used to accentuate the mountainous and glaciated terrain of the Pacific Ranges. Lighting rendered from multiple positions in several hues simulates a late (western) but warm evening summer sun. Because of Blender's ray-tracing capabilities, you'll note some very realistic shadows cast by the taller mountains onto larger water bodies. All data used to create this map is available in the public domain.

The Essential Geography of the Sea To Sky is the second map designed and published as part of Clark Geomatics' "essential geography" series, the first being "The Essential Geography of the Salish Sea." A third map in the series, under development, will feature Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Building on Dave Imus's philosophy of essential geography, which emphasizes clarity, coherence, and the integration of meaningful geographic context, I aim to produce maps that reflect a region's identity through carefully curated content and design that are informative as well as visually engaging.

Furthermore, I will explore how this type of map can alter perceptions, raise cultural awareness, and promote respect for the diversity and richness of the world's cultural and historical landscapes. I aim to demonstrate how modern cartography can be a powerful vehicle for storytelling and fostering a deeper understanding of our shared geographies.

The hope is that by showcasing the Sea to Sky corridor in this more inclusive way, viewers will rethink what they know about the place. Rather than treating these mountains and valleys as little more than a scenic backdrop for tourism, we invite everyone to see them as home to vibrant communities, living histories, and a UNESCO Biosphere Region worthy of deeper exploration.

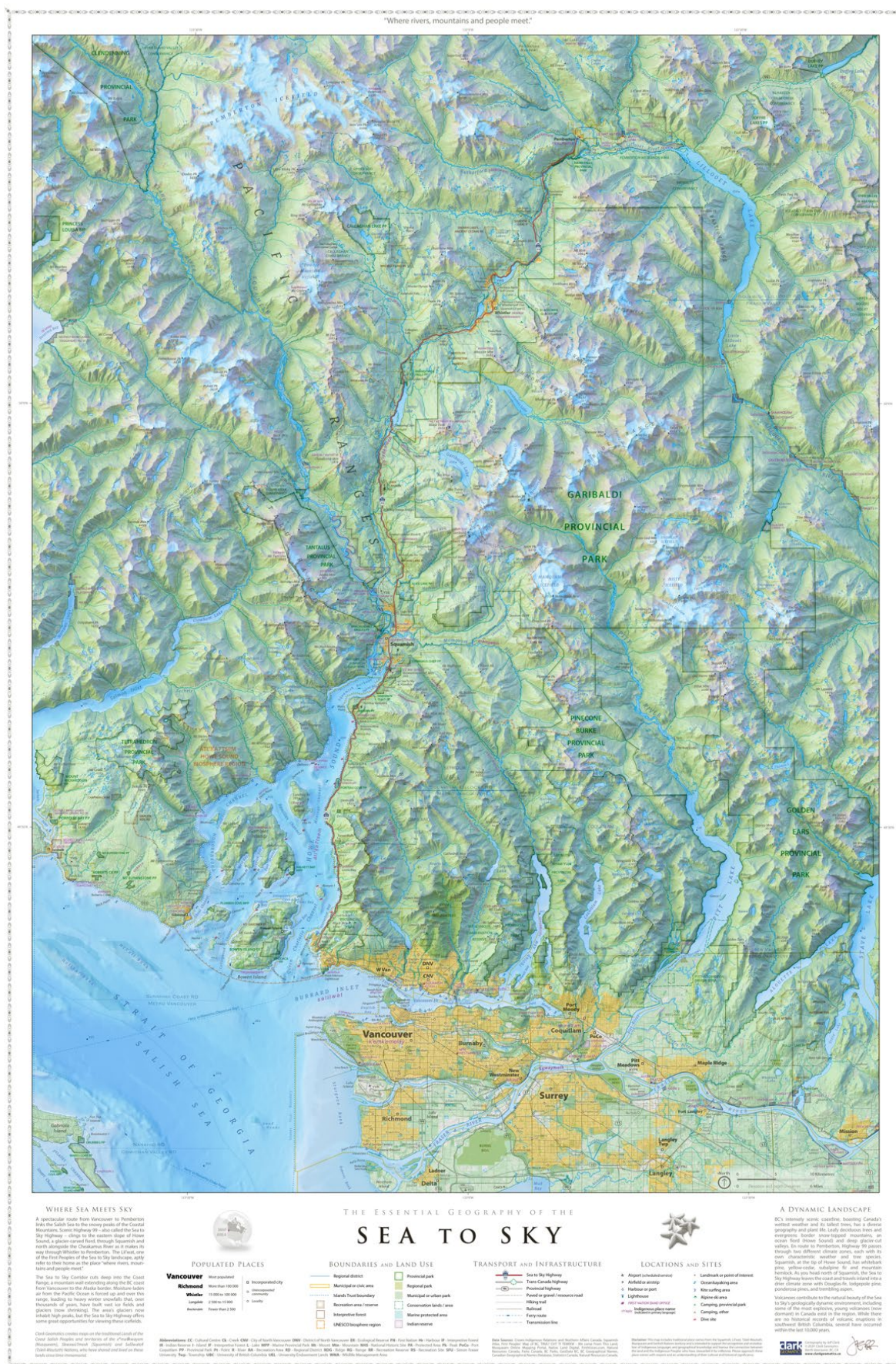


Figure 1. The Essential Geography of the Sea To Sky.