

BACKGROUND

HISTORY

LIVING OFF THE LAND

The ancestors of Vancouver's First Nations people began arriving in British Columbia (BC) at least 10,000 years ago, crossing via a land bridge at the Bering Strait near Alaska. They trickled southwards from here, with many setting up camp in coastal areas that are still regarded as important First Nations lands to this day. Those who traveled furthest eventually arrived at the warmer waters of what is now known as the Lower Mainland.

These first Vancouverites lived in villages comprising wood-plank houses arranged in rows, often surrounded by a stockade. Totem poles were set up nearby as an emblem of family or clan. It's not surprising that these groups were attracted to this area – the local beaches and rivers teamed with seafood, the forests bristled with tasty wildlife, including deer and elk, and fat silvery salmon were abundantly available to anyone who fancied outsmarting the odd bear for the privilege.

Several distinct communities formed. The Musqueam populated Burrard Inlet, English Bay and the mouth of the Fraser River, although they shared some of this area with the Squamish, who were largely based at the head of Howe Sound, but also had villages in North and West Vancouver, Kitsilano Point, Stanley Park and Jericho Beach. The Kwantlen controlled the area around New Westminster, while Delta and Richmond were home to the Tsawwassen. The Tsleil-Waututh occupied much of North Vancouver, while Coast Salish tribes, such as the Cowichan, Nanaimo and Saanich, set up

seasonal camps along the Fraser River when the salmon were running.

Art and creativity were key features of everyday life at this time. Many homes were adorned with exterior carvings and totem poles – later examples of which are displayed at the Museum of Anthropology (p101). These exemplified a reverential regard for nature, suggesting that early First Nations people enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. In many ways, they were Vancouver's 'green' founding fathers.

Scant evidence exists about this intriguing period in Vancouver's history: most settlements have crumbled to dust and few have been rediscovered by archaeologists. In addition, these early settlers generally maintained oral records – they told each other (often in song) the stories of their ancestors, rather than writing things down for posterity. This method would have been highly successful until the disruptive arrival of the Europeans.

CAPTAIN VAN HITS TOWN

After centuries of unhindered First Nations occupation, Europeans began arriving in the late 18th century. The Spanish sent three expeditions between 1774 and 1779 in search of the fabled Northwest Passage. They ended up by the entrance to Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island but didn't initially venture into the Strait of Georgia. British explorer Captain James Cook elbowed into the area from the South Pacific in 1779. He had a similar Northwest Passage motive, and a similar result: he hit the west coast of Vancouver Island and believed it to be the mainland. It wasn't until 1791 that the mainland-lined

TIMELINE

8000 BC

The region's first inhabitants begin arriving from Asia, via the Bering Strait. Rather than head back after a quick look around, they decide to stay and enjoy the abundant food and temperate climate.

1774

A little later than the First Nations settlers, the Spanish arrive in the area in search of the fabled Northwest Passage. They don't bother to venture any further than Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island.

1791

A little more adventurous than his colleagues, Spanish explorer José María Narváez edges into the Strait of Georgia, perhaps looking for a Tim Hortons donut shop.

NEW SPAIN?

Despite the name 'Vancouver' eventually sticking to the area, it's worth remembering that the Spanish stepped on shore here a few months before their British seafaring rivals. On the Point Grey coastline, not far from the University of British Columbia campus, you'll find a concrete, anchor-shaped public art installation facing a forested coastline that hasn't changed much since those early expeditions. Captain José María Narváez named this stretch of what's now called Spanish Banks Islas de Langara and his country's early influence can still be found in city street names and around the British Columbia coastline, where islands sport names like Saturna, Galiano and Texada.

Strait of Georgia was properly explored. Spanish navigator José María Narváez did the honors, sailing all the way into Burrard Inlet.

Next up was Captain George Vancouver, a British navigator who had previously sailed with Cook. In 1792 he glided into the inner harbor and spent one day here – a lucky day, as it turned out, though it didn't seem so at first. When he arrived, he discovered that the Spanish, in ships under the command of captains Valdez and Galiano, had already claimed the area. Meeting at what is today known as Spanish Banks, the men shared area navigational information. Vancouver made a note of the deep natural port, which he named Burrard after one of his crew. Then he sailed away, not thinking twice about a place that would eventually be named after him.

As Spanish influence in the area waned over the next few years in favor of the more persistent British, explorers such as Simon Fraser and Alexander Mackenzie began mapping the region's interior, opening it up for overland travelers, the arrival of the legendary Hudson's Bay Company, and the eventual full entry of the region into the British Empire.

GOLD, FUR & TIMBER

The region's abundant natural resources spurred creeping development throughout the first half of the 19th century. In 1824 the Hudson's Bay Company, under James McMillan's leadership, launched a network of fur-trading posts. McMillan noted a particularly good location about 50km from the mouth of the Fraser River, building Fort Langley (p109) there in 1827. The region's first permanent European settlement, the fur-trading fort shipped more than 2000 beaver pelts in 1832. Today the Hudson's Bay Company has developed into the Bay, a cross-Canada chain of department stores. Its flagship downtown location is at the corner of Granville and Georgia Sts.

In 1858 an interesting tidbit of news began percolating around the region: gold had been discovered on the banks of the Fraser River. More than 25,000 American prospectors rapidly swept in with picks, pans and get-rich-quick dreams. Concerned that the influx might inspire a US northern push, the mainland – following the lead of Vancouver Island, which had declared its colony status in 1849 – announced it was officially becoming part of the British Empire. James Douglas was sworn in as the governor of the expanded region – officially named British Columbia – although BC and the island remained separate protectorates at this time. The proclamation was made at Fort Langley on November 19, 1858.

Douglas requested British support and the Royal Engineers, under the command of Colonel Richard Moody, arrived at the end of 1858. Alarmed by Fort Langley's poor strategic location,

1792

The Brits decide to join the party when the Royal Navy's Captain George Vancouver sails into Burrard Inlet. He stays 24 hours then turns tail and heads out, just like many latter-day cruise-ship passengers.

1827

The Hudson's Bay Company builds Fort Langley, the first European settlement to grace the region. It would be several more decades before the Bay launches its first department-store sale.

1858

Gold is discovered on the banks of the Fraser River, prompting more than 25,000 prospectors to arrive with picks and pans.