

# Mount Tolmie Park

## PARK HISTORY

Before Europeans settled in the area, the Songhees people called this hill "Pkaals". In more recent times, as early as 1845, this hill was referred to as Mount Tolmie, after Dr. W. F. Tolmie, a surgeon with the Hudson's Bay Company. Dr. Tolmie was also a biologist who became a prominent citizen in the area.

Originally, in 1891, an area of 6.48 ha (16 acres) was identified for a Park Reserve and later officially became parkland. This new parkland continued to be called Mount Tolmie Park. The park grew in 1926 when additional property was purchased by the Municipality of Saanich and again in 2003 through a donation, which included part of Kingsberry Pond.

Mount Tolmie has attracted various public activities over the years, including Easter Sunday services at the park summit, and an unlikely amusement park roller coaster that burned down in the early 1900s. The Easter services began in 1923 and continued until 1942, when they were interrupted by the Department of National Defense's use of the summit as an observation post during WWII. The Easter services prompted the formal organization of natural area preservation efforts in 1937, when people began to protect the plants from picking at Easter time.

The construction of the summit viewing area and landscaping for the park entrance and picnic areas began in 1957, funded by the Provincial Capital Commission. The Capital Regional District's water reservoir followed in 1969. The reservoir has a capacity of 4.8 million litres and serves the neighbourhoods east of Mount Douglas to the southern boundary of Saanich.

Volunteers started removing invasive plants such as blackberry, broom, daphne and ivy in 1994 and these activities led to the formation of the Mount Tolmie Conservancy Association. Its members have planted hundreds of trees and shrubs and continue to restore the former natural character of the park. In 1995, this philosophy was formalized when the park was re-zoned to Natural Park (P-4N). In 2008, the Saanich Rotary Club planted 50 Garry oaks to commemorate the 50th year of the Rotary organization.

This prominent park is a popular destination for residents and tourists, and to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors, improvements were made in 2010. These included the upgrade of the lower parking lot and the installation of the geographic marker at the summit, a joint project between the Mount Tolmie Community Association and the Saanich Rotary Club.



Vista of Shelbourne Valley 1906-08, Saanich Archives



Vista of Shelbourne Valley 2009

## PARK FEATURES

The exceptional views from the summit are part of the reason the park has always been associated with hiking and sight-seeing. Widely recognized as "The Best Place to View the City", the summit viewpoints provide an excellent panorama of Greater Victoria and the surrounding region, including Mount Douglas, the Olympic Mountains, Race Rocks and Lighthouse, the San Juan Islands and Mount Baker in the Cascade Range of Washington State.

### Trails

There are over 1500 m of trails within the park and many lead to the summit, through meadows and up rocky slopes. They also access picnic and viewing sites, secluded natural areas and great spots for bird watching and quiet contemplation.

### Natural Areas

B.C.'s only native oak species, the Garry oak, is at the extreme northern limit of its North American range on Vancouver Island. The dry, exposed rocky bluffs of Mount Tolmie Park support the shallow soil Garry oak ecosystem. The remnant of this ecosystem within the park is one of the best in Saanich. Also found in the park and unique to our region is a broadleaf evergreen tree, the arbutus, with a satiny, smooth, chartreuse-coloured bark that turns reddish-brown in the fall and peels away. The peeling bark is an adaptation to this region's droughty summers.

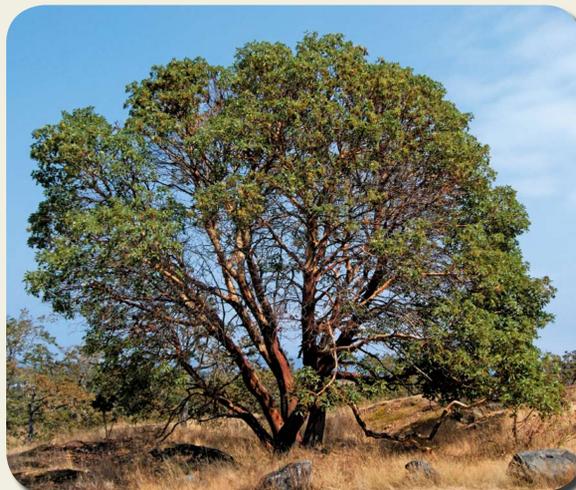
In addition to its Garry oak ecosystem, other factors contribute to Mount Tolmie's ecological significance. Its geographical location and the height of the mountain provide an important stop-over for migratory birds. Its range of natural features, including a pond, open rock outcrops and seasonal pools, provide habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife. The park supports approximately 100 bird species, 11 butterfly species, 15 mammals and probably thousands of insect species.

Spectacular spring wildflowers including camas, white fawn lily, shootingstar, western buttercup, sea blush and satinflower colour the slopes, while a diversity of mosses, lichens, licorice ferns and other native species cling to trees and rocky areas.

## NATURAL HISTORY

The mottled, grey-coloured bedrock of Mount Tolmie's summit and surrounding outcrops belong to the Wark gneiss. This is composed of a variety of rock metamorphosed during the Jurassic period, about 200 million years ago. Signs of the last ice age (that ended about 12,000 years ago) are visible in areas below the summit. Many broken rock faces have fine scratches, called slickensides, and other rock faces have been marked with shallow grooves from the glaciers that moved across their surface.

Mount Tolmie is the highest peak in the Bowker Creek watershed and defines the eastern boundary. Over half of the original creek channel has been piped and is now underground. Bowker Creek and its watershed and meadows were an important part of the cultural heritage of Saanich. Songhees peoples managed the land using fire and cultivation of camas bulbs, which were a staple food and trade item.



Arbutus tree



Geological feature at summit

## PARK INFORMATION

Please treat the park with respect to preserve the Garry oak ecosystems and other sensitive natural areas. Do your part:

- Stay on the designated trails.
- Cycling is permitted only on the paved road within the park.
- Dogs are permitted in the park and must be under control. Please pick up after your pet and deposit bags in waste containers.
- Leave the wildflowers and wildlife undisturbed.
- Keep our parks clean and put litter in waste containers.
- Do not plant or dispose of garden waste in any park lands.

### Organizations

Mount Tolmie Conservancy Association  
Friends of Bowker Creek Society

