

From the Forest to the Sea Walkalong for Learning

This August 31, please join in the first annual Walkalong for Learning, a 6 km trek that will traverse the trails of mid-island protected lands in a bid to raise funds for environmental education programs. Hosted by the Galiano Conservancy Association, the event offers participants a spectacular walk from Laughlin Lake through coastal forests to the sea and then back to the GCA Learning Centre land for a community celebration, complete with music, prizes, food, cake and home-made ice cream.

The Walkalong will take place Saturday, August 31 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., with a celebration to follow at the Learning Centre land, at 10825 Porlier Pass Drive, from 4 to 7 p.m.

All participants – who can complete all or as much of the 6 km as they can manage – are asked to gather pledges from their circle of family and friends, either in person or through the event's online fundraising campaign, which can be accessed at <gcawalkalong.causevox.com>.

You can also pick up paper pledge forms at the GCA Office. Enlist your family, friends and Facebook friends to support your fundraising goal!

Friendly competition to raise the most funds will be rewarded with prizes donated by on-island businesses and services including two nights at an oceanside Bed & Breakfast, concert tickets or works of art, crafts and photography by Galiano artists. There will also be a random draw for a range of prizes at the celebration.

Each walker is asked to pay a \$10 registration fee to cover event expenses. Then you can begin your own campaign to gather pledges and donations. Funds will go to help greater numbers of children and adults to take part in GCA environmental educational programs. Since the year 2000, the Galiano Conservancy has been able to give the gift of nature to more than 7,000 people, most of them children whose daily lives may lack the natural beauty of the island environment that those of us on Galiano so treasure. A key goal for the Conservancy is to construct a new Learning Centre at the mid-island site that can present educational programs as well as host school groups and longer-term visitors.

Imagine a child who has never experienced the brilliant canopy of stars overhead at night on the Gulf Islands, who is eager to learn the difference between a sea-star and a sea-urchin, or how to tell salal from salmonberry. In our ever more urbanized world, scientists and sociologists alike acknowledge the intrinsic value to people of all ages in the direct experience and interaction with nature. The Walkalong for Learning offers each islander and visitor the opportunity to enrich lives by directly contributing to nature education at the GCA Restorative Learning Centre land.

The Walkalong also offers an opportunity for all islanders to celebrate the newly-completed Mid-Galiano Conservation Network. The GCA recently achieved another key goal with the purchase of the "missing link" --DL 58--which will connect to the Learning Centre land on DL 57. Our Walkalong will begin at 1 pm at Laughlin Lake and make a complete loop of island trails back to the lake. We'll first head south, to follow the Restoration Interpretive Trail on DL 63 all the way to Cable Bay. Walkers can rest at this beautiful cove then carry on south along the trail to Pebble Beach, another protected site and favorite island swimming spot. We'll take the Pebble Beach trail through the majestic shady old forest of DL 60, then turn north to the head of the Pebble Beach trail, at the sign and parking lot. From there, we'll return to Laughlin Lake, where the GCA bus will shuttle walkers from the lake back to the Learning Centre land.

To reach the start of the Walkalong at Laughlin Lake, take Porlier Pass Drive north on Galiano to Vineyard Way, turn left and continue about 1 km until you see signs for the event.

The Walkalong is open to all ages and abilities. Most walkers can plan for a pleasant two- to three-hour walk, with ample time to pause along the way to appreciate the wide range of Galiano landscapes. Back at the Learning Centre, there will be complimentary ice cream and cake. You can enjoy your own packed lunch or purchase snacks and beverages. Please carry your own personal water bottle for the hike, which you are welcome to refill at water stations at the trail start and along the way.

A key feature of the Walkalong to Learning is the ability to turn to your own affinity groups to support this worthwhile cause. You can register on your own as a fundraiser or sign up on the website: <gcawalkalong.causevox.com> to join an existing fundraising team or create one for you and your friends. Donations are eligible for tax receipts but must be accompanied by contact information for the donor. The Galiano Conservancy Association's own website <galianoconservancy.ca/walkalong> contains valuable information about the work of the conservancy and the goals of this community fundraising campaign.

What better way to cap off a perfect summer on Galiano than by extending a hand to children, youth, adults and seniors, to enable them to enjoy their own learning experience! You may have lived here for years, loving this island, or visit a few times a year or only occasionally. This is your chance to help raise much-needed funds to ensure the core programs of the Conservancy continue to thrive and grow.

We hope this important event will become a joyous annual community celebration and an opportunity for everyone to help preserve and learn about our island ecosystems.

Please start your fundraising at our online site or contact the Conservancy at 250-539-2424 to obtain a pledge sheet.

By Suzanne Fournier