

## Recommended Circle Route around BC by Car: (10-14 days)



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I see many a post on the rec.travel.usa-canada newsgroup for recommendations on what route to take for a circle tour from Vancouver to Calgary and back. I'm getting tired of describing it, so by placing it here, I can simply refer them to my web page. You need 14 days to do this trip comfortably with stops, and 1 or 2 days staying put in one spot you may like. You could push it and do it in 8-10 days. Each number below, represents a trip you **could** manage in one day, but a long one. To be comfortable, split steps 1, 2, 3 and 8 into 2 days. If you are only going one way, you cannot of course follow my recommendation. In this case I would follow the southern route I have suggested (Items 4-8 in reverse). **Please note that the driving times are just that, not including stops, and assuming you are following the speed limits.** The route is illustrated in the map at the bottom of the page. I have removed all other highways from the map to simplify it. The yellow circles represent BC Highway Number designations.

I get many enquiries about a "Coastal Highway". There is really no such thing. The coast of BC is too rugged. There are small stretches of Coastal Highway, notably Highway 99 from Vancouver to Squamish & also Highway 101 up the Sunshine Coast (see map below). Apart from some short sections on Vancouver Island, that's about it.

Some of sights mentioned have pictures associated with them if they are underlined. Click on them to bring up a photo in a new window.

**1) Vancouver to Cache Creek: Total Distance 390 Km ( 251 mi) or 300 Km (212 mi) depending on route choice at Lilloette (longest is most scenic). This is either 4 hours or 5.5 hours driving time)**

Cross over the Lions Gate Bridge from Downtown and take Highway 99 north along spectacular Howe Sound to Squamish, Whistler and Pemberton. (150 km) Continue to the high desert country at Lilloette, (99 km) and then either take Highway 12 to join Highway 1 at Lytton in the Fraser Canyon, then turn north on Highway 1 to the desert town of Cache Creek (140 km). Alternatively, to save 1.5 hours, take Highway 99 to just north of Cache Creek, then south on Hwy 97 to Cache Creek ( 85 km) This is a full long days trip from Vancouver, including stops. (Be careful at Pemberton, the turnoff to Lillooette is easy to miss and you can end up on the Anderson Lake road by mistake. There is a General Store at the junction, stop and make sure you are in the right place. Note if you split this step into 2 days, its a lot cheaper to stay in Pemberton than Whistler.

**2) Cache Creek to Valemount:** Total Distance 485 km (300 mi) or if you take 4 days & do Barkerville as well, its 1130 km (700 mi), Driving time for 1 day option is 6 hours, for 4 day option it's 13 hours.

Take Highway 1 to Kamloops (84 km) and then turn north on Highway 5 to Clearwater (120 km). At Clearwater, take a side trip into Wells Gray Park to see the spectacular [Helmekin Falls](#), one of the most impressive on the continent (80 km return). Continue north on Highway 5 to Valemount. (200 km).

If you have 3 extra days, you can alternatively double back 30 km to Hwy 24 at little Fort and then over to Hwy 97 and up to Barkerville, a restored Gold Rush town. This is well worth seeing if you have the extra time, but you will need 2 days extra traveling plus a day in Barkerville itself. If you take this route, continue north to Prince George then east on Hwy 16 to Tete Jaune Cache, just north of Valemount, to join back with my original route.(850 km)

**3) Valemount to Calgary:** Total Distance 385 km (240 mi) or 500 km (300 mi) all the way to Calgary.

Just north of Valemount, turn east on Highway 16 at Tete Jaune Cache. You will cross into the province of Alberta on this Highway. There is no border post. I worked on this stretch of highway for the highways department in the 70's and you wouldn't believe the number of tourists who thought they had to pass through customs to get into Alberta. You will, however, have to pay for a National Parks pass. The drive to Jasper, Alberta (110 km) takes you past Mt. Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies. At Jasper, turn south and follow the scenic Jasper-Banff highway to Banff. (275 km) Assuming, you don't spend any time in Jasper, this is another days drive. Head east to Calgary (130 km) or double back to Lake Louise & continue back to Vancouver.

**4) Banff to Cranbrook:** Total Distance 275 km (170 mi) 3 hours driving time.

From Banff head south on Highway 93 to Radium Hot Springs (130 km) and then south on Highway 95 to Cranbrook. (145km) It is worth stopping at both Radium and Ft. Steele. Including stops this is a days drive.

**5) Cranbrook to Nakusp:** Total Distance 325 km (200 mi). Driving time 3 hours plus allow 2 more for ferry crossings & wait time.

From Cranbrook, continue south on Highway 95, and then west on Highway 3 to Creston. (110 km) At Creston head north on Highway 34 to Kootenay Bay (78 km). Here you cross Kootenay lake on a free ferry (the Government is proposing a toll for 2003) . Head north on Highway 31 to Kaslo (36 km) and then on 31A to New Denver (50 km) and Highway 6 to Nakusp (50 km). Another days drive with views of Lakes and Glaciers.

**6) Nakusp to Vernon:** Total Distance 200 km (125 mi) or 250 km (150 mi). Total Driving time 3 or 4 hours plus allow 2 hours for ferry & wait time.

From Nakusp, head south on Highway 6 to Fauquier (60 km) and cross Arrow Lake on another free ferry (also possibly a toll by 2003) . From Needles on the other side, follow Highway 6 to Vernon in the semi-arid [Okanagan Valley](#). This is the start of Okanagan lake (135 km). or continue to Kelowna (50 km). Be sure to stop at the [Kalamalka Lake](#) Viewpoint just south of Vernon. This lake has interesting colour patterns.

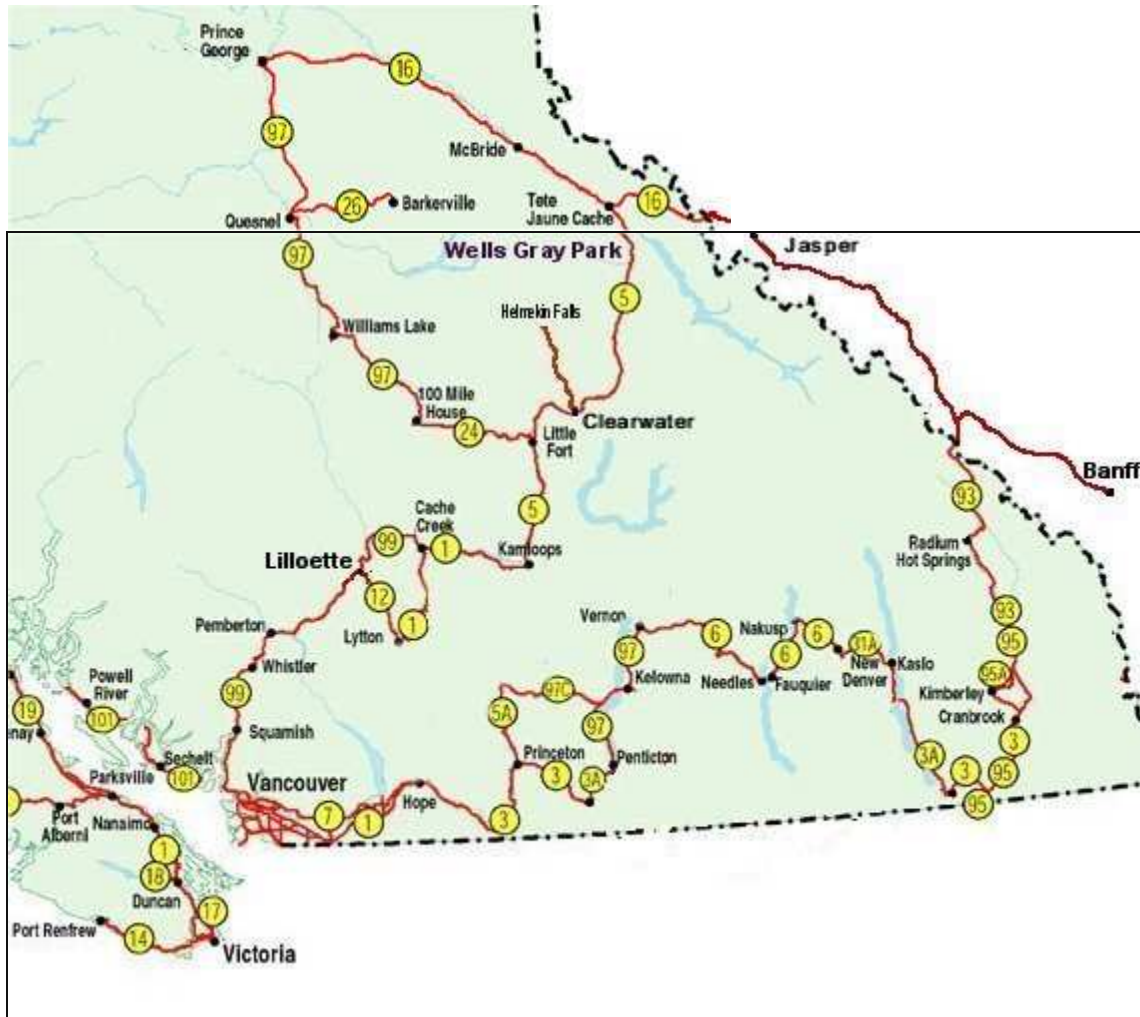
**7) Total Distance 70 to 120 km (45 to 75 mi). Total driving time 1-2 hours.**

From Vernon, head south on Highway 97 to Kelowna. You will want to spend a day along this short stretch, swimming or visiting vineyards. Continue south to Penticton (70 km or 120 km from Vernon) if you like, but I would recommend retracing back up Highway 97 to the junction with Highway 97C just north of Peachland. This is another days journey.

**8) Total Distance 420 km or 500 km, depending on route & start point (250-300 mi).**

From Penticton you can take Highway 97 and Highway 3A to Keremeos and then Highway 3 to Princeton (110 km), but my personal preference is to take the junction just north of Peachland which is Highway 97C. This 85 km stretch of Highway is very boring, but it takes you to Highway 5A (80 km - 105 from Kelowna or 150 from Penticton) (if you hit a 2 lane stretch, you've missed the junction). Highway 5A, takes you south to Princeton (60 km) and is one of the prettiest stretches of road in BC, with picture perfect Alpine lakes. From Princeton, take Highway 3 to Hope (126km) (make sure you stop at [Lightning lakes](#), 65 km from Princeton, this is also a good place to stay, but you need to reserve- Campsite or Lodge) and then head back to Vancouver. (150km) As an alternative at Hope, you can head a short way up Highway 1, until you cross the Fraser River and then take Highway 7 back to Vancouver, a scenic alternative to the Freeway.(170 km) This is a long days drive from the Okanagan if you do it one day.

**This Map outlines the route above and its options. I have erased all the highways that do not apply. The Jasper-Banff section is in Alberta.** (the break in the highway near Jasper is just an error in my graphics, there are actually 2 separate images there)



**Below is a more detailed map of the Jasper-Banff section of the route in Alberta.**  
**Click the map to visit the web site it originated on.**

