



Trails Today, the trails in Cowee-Davies are confined mostly to the northwestern lowlands. Most popular is the Point Bridget Trail that begins in peatlands by the highway and descends to Juneau's finest uplift parkland—known as Cowee Meadows—mostly within Point Bridget State Park. In the early 1900s, the entire watershed was transected by mining trails (yellow dashed lines), mostly long since overgrown. Note lack of correspondence between historic and modern trails, except for the Bessie, which climbs to the SW watershed boundary.

Ownership Most of the upper watershed is Tongass National Forest. Point Bridget Peninsula is a combination of State Park and private land. Goldbelt Inc. owns most of Echo Cove. CBJ lands include the coast south from Akiyama Bight, and much of Cowee Creek south of the highway.

Trail mileages:
 Point Bridget (3.5 mi)
 Lower Cowee (2.8 mi)
 Upper Cowee (0.5 mi)
 Echo Beach Route (2.7 mi)
 Cedar Lake (1.9 mi)
 Trappers (1.0 mi)
 McMurchie Cat Trail (1.2 mi)
 Bessie Creek (2.0 mi)

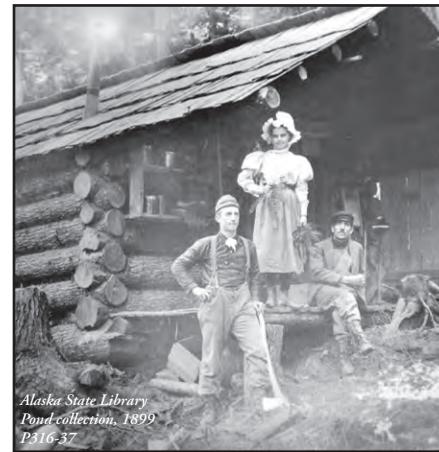
Rocks, mines, mountain steepness

Cowee Creek follows the alignment of the Gastineau Channel fault (dashed pink line). The South Fork traces the fault all the way to the southern edge of the watershed in Yankee Basin. On the seaward side of this dominant fault are relatively "soft" sedimentary and volcanic rocks of low relief. Inland (NE), terrain is more rugged, with gold-bearing slate and limestone, similar to the rocks of Silverbow Basin above downtown Juneau. This rock unit, (*Trclt* pale blue), hosted most of the mines of Yankee and Cottrell Basins, and the only really profitable operation in the northern Gold Belt—the Eagle River Mine.

Continuing northeast from the gold-bearing *Trclt* unit, jagged, glaciated headwalls are of massive, resistant tonalite, a variety of granite. At Cowee-Davies, these granitic rocks come closer to the beach than elsewhere along the road system. Great Ice Age glaciers couldn't subdue them—thus the breathtaking relief of this watershed. The Mendenhall Towers—highest summits visible from Juneau's shoreline—may be 1000 feet higher than Peak 5894 separating Cowee and Davies basins. But they're 4 times farther from the beach. The upward angle from Auke Bay to the Towers is only 6° above horizontal. The angle from Echo Cove up to Peak 5894 is 16°.

"Hotel Scotia," camp quarters near the California claim at about 600 feet on the ridge east of Echo Cove, 1899.

Left to right: Percy Pond (of Winter & Pond photography); his wife Hattie; and John Davies, of Davies Creek. Like other mines of Cowee-Davies, the Pond-Davies venture never yielded enough gold to offset the heavy labor invested.



Alaska State Library
 Pond collection, 1899
 P316-37

This trail guide is part of a series of interpretive products created in 2010 for trails on CBJ lands by Discovery Southeast. Other creations include natural history signs, a summary guide to CBJ trails and free web products.

Discovery Southeast

Founded in 1989, DSE is a nonprofit organization promoting direct, hands-on learning from nature through natural science and outdoor education for youth, adults, and teachers. Discovery naturalists deepen the bonds between people & nature.
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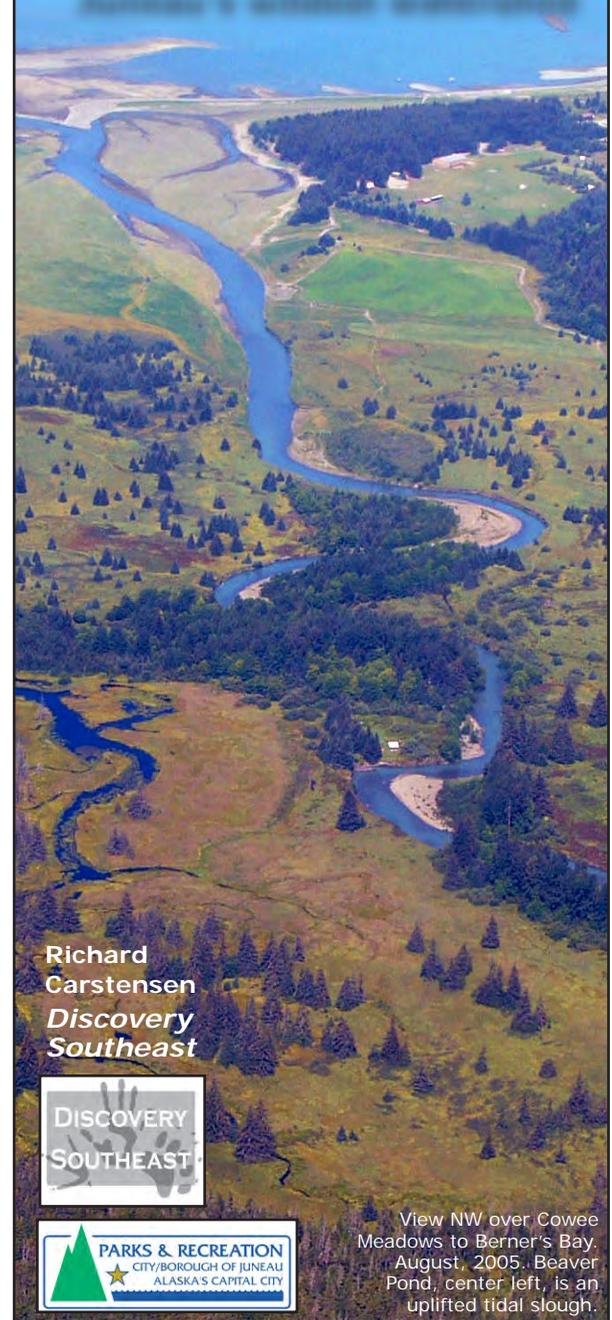
CBJ Parks & Recreation

The City and Borough of Juneau/Parks & Recreation welcomes you. Parks & Recreation manages 50 miles of trails and fosters innovative stewardship of its diverse resources. Collectively, along with our partners Alaska State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, Trail Mix and SAGA, 135 miles of trails are managed—connecting our community with Juneau's magnificent landscape.

We hope you have a great experience on your trails. Take only memories, leave only footprints. Call Parks & Recreation at 586-5226. • www.juneau.org/parksrec

Natural History of Cowee-Davies

Juneau's wildest watershed



Richard
 Carstensen
 Discovery
 Southeast



View NW over Cowee Meadows to Berner's Bay, August, 2005. Beaver Pond, center left, is an uplifted tidal slough.

Juneau's wildest watershed

Cowee-Davies is the wildest, fishiest, beariest watershed on the Juneau road system. It has by far the greatest remaining acreage of large-tree, streamside spruce forest, and of "uplift parkland," a globally rare habitat, described below. The watershed's most popular attractions today are the launch area at the head of Echo Cove, and trails threading Cowee meadows. But the almost untraveled middle and upper reaches of the watershed are just as unique and spectacular.

Little Ice Age legacies

On the geology map (flip side), white lines show positions of alpine glaciers in 1910 and 1948. None descended to the lowlands during the Little Ice Age (mid-1700s), but they contributed more flow to Cowee and Davies Creeks, rejuvenating their flood plains. The character of the large-tree spruce forest in the Cowee-Davies bottomlands is a legacy of Little Ice Age hydrology.



View east from trail through Cowee Meadows. Distant summits are of resistant granitic bedrock. Foreground was tidal at peak of Little Ice Age. Unnamed peaks are identified by elevation.

Little Ice Age glacial advances and icefield thickening also depressed the land, which is now rebounding at about 0.8 inches per year. Two centuries ago, tides washed all the way to the head of Cowee meadows. As you walk south through the meadows, climbing almost imperceptibly, you pass progressively older communities that have colonized the former tidelands. The 300-yard profile, below, is a microcosm of the 2-mile "uplift transect" from stream mouth to the southern end of the meadows.

Habitats

Uplift parkland Cowee is best known for its inviting meadow-parkland, at 620 acres by far the largest extent of undeveloped raised tideland in the CBJ. When tides no longer wash over a rebounding salt marsh, diverse grasses and tall herbs take over. Here and there—perhaps where a digging bear exposed raw mineral soil—young spruce take hold. Outstanding wildlife habitat, the Cowee uplift parkland is largely protected within Point Bridget State Park; a third belongs to Echo Ranch.

Large-tree forests Deposits of streams and rivers (alluvium) typically support large Sitka spruce. Cowee-Davies watershed contains 15% of the large-tree alluvial spruce forest of the entire Lynn Canal biogeographic province that extends from Skagway to Mendenhall Valley. Within the CBJ, only Windfall and Montana-McGinnis valleys approach Cowee for acreage of large-



tree alluvial forest; combined they amount to only half of Cowee's.

Second growth In about 1940, Allen McMurchie bought the homestead that today is known as Echo Ranch. Over the next 2 decades he logged up Cowee Creek, on the hill separating Echo Cove from Cowee Meadows, and above Bridget Cove—360 acres in all. Recovery has been quite variable. At Bridget Cove red alder colonized. Southeast of Echo Ranch are "dog-hair" conifer stands. In 1999, Goldbelt Inc. logged 65 acres north of Davies Creek. Second growth is shown on the flip-side geology map with white hatch lines.

Fish

Flood-plain streams offer optimum habitat for spawning and rearing salmonids. Cowee-Davies has far more low-gradient, flood-plain channel than any other CBJ stream system. Much of it lies within the Gastineau Channel fault (dashed pink line, flip-side map). Cowee and Davies have abundant large fallen logs and productive alder fringe (bright green, below), key features of fine fish habitat.

Left: Landmark Tree team scores an exceptional spruce forest on upper Cowee Creek.

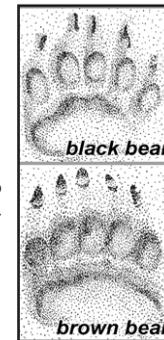
Right: Habitat complexity at the confluence of Cowee and Davies Creeks. Beaver are keystone species here.



Wildlife

Both black and brown bears live here. In these front-foot track illustrations, black bears have shorter claws and more widely-spaced toes. Cowee-Davies has the finest brown-bear habitat in the CBJ. Less tolerant than black bears of humans, brownies have been pushed back to the heads of most local watersheds, where fishing is usually not possible. Cowee and Davies creeks are exceptions; here, salmon run far beyond the reach of human trails.

Species found in Cowee-Davies that are uncommon elsewhere in the CBJ include western toad, wolf, Townsend's solitaire and mountain bluebird. Many decades of horse grazing have impacted plant succession in the Cowee uplift parkland.



History

Cowee-Davies is home of the Wooshkeetaan clan (Shark Crest) of the Auk Kwáan Tlingit. By the late 1800s, Cowee watershed was sprinkled with prospects and short-lived mining operations. Yankee and Cottrell basins were accessed via the planked road up Bessie Creek, and later, from a trail up Boulder Creek.

In 2009, the US Forest Service designated the entirety of its holdings in this watershed as the 25,500-acre Héen Latinee Experimental Forest. The Tlingit name means "River Watcher." Researchers hope to initiate long-term studies of climate change, streams and fish, and terrestrial-marine interactions.

