

Duncan North to Ladysmith...4 Variations

The Trans Canada Trail uses Somonos Road, west of the Island Highway.

1. From downtown take Government St (a safer, calmer alternative is Jubilee St by the Post Office which curves up the hill onto Cavell, turn left on Cairnsmore and then right onto Government) and Cowichan Lakes Road until you reach the second roundabout. This section is busy and mainly uphill.
2. Continue straight north on Somonos Road, which is flat and busy until it reaches the Cowichan Valley Highway. Wide paved shoulders are being added here.
3. Use caution when crossing the highway; the vehicles are going fast.
4. Continue north as Somonos narrows into a pretty, shoulder-less country road with moderate uphill around the edge of Mt Prevost. If you want a serious and beautiful mountain work-out turn left at the sign for Mt. Provost, which is a forest reserve, for some great views of the Valley and islands.
5. Somonos Road ends at the Trans Canada Hiway, with you going against the traffic. You could cross the highway here but it is a curved incline and not the safest place to cross.
6. Follow the highway north, climbing moderately for a few kilometers to Mt Sicker Rd. Cross the highway; there is a traffic light here and Russell Farms market is just north of the intersection.
7. Mt Sicker Rd ends at Chemainus Rd. Turn north. From the highway turnoff until Saltair is basically as flat as you'll find in the Cowichan valley. Saltair to Ladysmith has some climbing.
8. If your destination is Crofton or the Salt Spring Ferry, turn right onto the Crofton Road which is relatively flat. Mt Sicker/Crofton Road is the heavy truck route for big trucks headed to and from the pulp mills. Crofton is not the prettiest destination but the beach is nice and there are a few nice small cafes down by the water/beach/ferry terminal area...The ferry is only a 20 minute ride and is bike friendly...\$2 extra for a bike besides the normal walk-on fare. Tickets are for a return trip. You load first before the cars and unload first. You don't have to wait for the next ferry if there's lots of cars. There is indoor seating if it is cold or rainy so you can warm up.
9. If you going north, veer left with the road. Just north of the bridge crossing the Chemanius River there is a nice park pullover area if you want a rest or a snack. As you get closer to Chemanius the road gets busy but you have wide paved shoulders to ride on.
10. Chemanius is a premier tourist destination and well-worth a visit. Lots of good restaurants and cafes, a nice park between downtown and the old town, murals, beautiful heritage buildings and houses, a Wednesday market in the tourist season, lots of boutiques, a beach, and ferries to Thetis and Kuper Islands.
11. The shoulders narrow in Saltair, become a shoulder on just one side, and then disappear. Saltair is Valley country living at it's finest. As you go uphill out of Chemanius you get some beautiful views of the water and islands. The pub in Saltair is the prettiest little pub I think I've ever seen. There's a wee second hand book store and a country store further north.
12. Once you cross into Ladysmith there are new marked bike/pedestrian sidewalks/lanes. Ladysmith has a new bike lane headed north out of town, just completed this summer (2011). Ladysmith is an Edwardian heritage town sitting on the side of a mountain overlooking the water. Again, good restaurants, the bakery is one of many local favorites for lunch, boutiques, an impressive harbour park down by the water and a mountain park snuggling the other side of town.

Other routes: all of which join up to the Mt Sicker/ Chemanius Rd junction in the first route.

Lakes Road/Herd Rd/ Richards Trail: my pick as the most scenic and maybe the best work-out if you are looking to keep/get fit.

1. Take Trunk or Beverly going east from town and turn left at Lakes Road.
2. From the roundabout at Beverly and Lakes you'll see a big hill in front of you. Find a nice climbing gear; it's one of the bigger uphill around Duncan. If you're not in shape, take your time and stop and rest whenever you need to. After about a km and a half, the road flattens out for the middle third and turns into rolling hills for the north third.
3. Lakes Road and Herd Road have wide paved shoulders. Turn right on Herd (you can use Norcross and Herd Roads to get here too if you are coming from the Walmart area.)
4. Make a quick left onto Richards Trail. This is one of the prettiest narrow country roads in the valley, and a moderate workout as there is really no flat ground on it at all...the hills are not as big as the Lakes Road hill. Nice forests and trees and you pass a number of artisan sites.
5. If you want to go through Crofton instead, continue on Westholme Road, rolling up and down moderately past Richards until you see the sign for Crofton Rd at Osborn Bay Road. There is a slow uphill climb and then a quick descent into Crofton at the end. (which is a doublepuffer going back to Duncan). Continue north from Crofton on the Crofton Rd, which will lead you to Chemanius Rd where you turn north for Chemanius.
6. Richards Trail ends at Westholme Road, go right. A few more hills and then the road flattens out before you come to Mt Sicker road. No shoulders, but the traffic is sparse.

Bell McKinnon Rd. Going left from the Highway at Drinkwater (the North End of the Walmart box stores) Bell Mckinnon takes off at a diagonal to the highway and up a hill...this route is not as scenic as either Somonos or Richards Trail, but other than the highway itself is the most direct and maybe the most expedient. It has a few good hills on it and should work up a bit of a sweat. It ends, going down a fair sized hill, at Westholme Road which you follow to Mt Sicker where it becomes Chemanius Rd.

The Island highway. If you don't mind the traffic (you have wide paved shoulders, that narrow slightly with the embankments on up/downhill curves) the least hilly route is the highway. Turn off at Mt Sicker and take Chemanius Road unless you really like the highway, in which case just keep on going north.