



A variety of different mark trees showing distinctive marking characteristics; an estuary willow clump (left) with bite marks, smooth bark and broken branches; a medium sized Sitka spruce (middle) with lots of pitch and snagged hair and smoothed branch stubs; and a large amabilis fir (right) with missing bark, claw marks and very smooth trunk.





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Mark trees are often found near good feeding habitat such as estuaries (left) and skunk cabbage swamps (above). All age classes of grizzly and black bears use mark trees. Sometimes the maximum height marked on a tree will indicate the largest bears in the area. The adult male grizzly on the left is over 2.7 m tall (the biologist is 1.8 m tall).





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Marking is not only confined to trees; trail signs (above) and logs (right) may also be used. The sign is on a trail leading to a popular fishing area for both bears and people (note the signs even says that the area is frequented by bears). The log is at the edge of an estuary and is used by bears to rub their backs while walking under the log (note the well worn under side and end of the log).



## 2.6. Bear Wallows

Bears dig wallows in seepage areas and then roll in the wet mud. Bears may commonly use wallows in summer, to keep cool and/or obtain relief from insect bites. Wallows may also be used as “scenting” sites for social communication. Bear wallows are usually, but not always, associated with marking behaviour of some sort (e.g. mark trees, mark trails) (MacHutchon 2000).

Wallows are almost always found where there is seepage or the water table is close to the surface. Typical locations are in, or beside, shrubby fringes of estuaries and wetlands, in open forests, where an underground spring comes to the surface, or in small pockets of imperfect drainage. Wallows are often found in proximity to mark trees and well-worn bear trails. Mark trails may also lead to or go around the wallow.

Wallows vary greatly in size and shape depending on site characteristics, amount of water present and the type of soil. Characteristically, wallows have a pool of water in the centre surrounded by freshly churned mud and a sparsely vegetated rim.

Bear wallows are easy to differentiate from those of moose and elk, where these ungulates occur on the BC coast. Bear wallows contain lots of shed hairs and also provide excellent conditions for tracks. The edges of bear wallows may be worn smooth from bears laying and rubbing against them. Tree branches, roots and duff along the edges usually have an abundance of snagged hairs. The fine bear hairs contrast with the coarse hairs of ungulates. Moose and elk urinate in their wallows, leaving a strong and distinctive musky odour. Bear wallows are also often in situations which preclude their use by large ungulates, for example, under low-hanging limbs of trees.

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