

GETTIN' THERE

aviation information for local destinations

Destination:

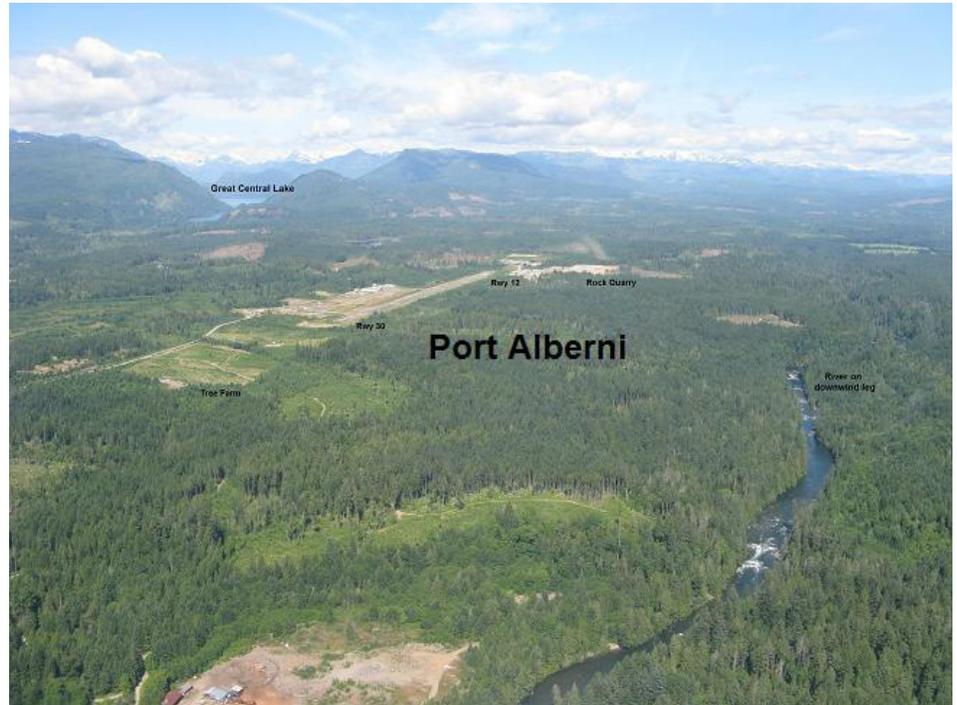
Port Alberni (CBS8 – Alberni Valley Regional)

Why Go?

There are several good reasons to fly up to Port Alberni. The challenge is that the airport is 11km from town which means, for most of those good reasons, you'll have to arrange some sort of transportation to town. The exception is if you're headed to Port Alberni to go gliding with the Vancouver Island Soaring Centre or the Alberni Valley Soaring Association. The flight itself can be spectacular, especially if you come up the centre of Vancouver Island. Just remember - the central island route is a mountain flight and if you're flying a Club airplane you'll need to have the Mountain Flying Course.

The airport is a small but nicely maintained building with washrooms available. If you want to get to town or the many tourist venues in the region you'll need to call a cab from town or be picked up.

Located in the Alberni Valley area are several lakes, a couple of vineyards and of course the Town of Port Alberni. From an aviation view, what makes Port



Alberni famous is that it's the home of Coulson Flying Tankers, operators of the Martin Mars water bombers.

Getting There

I've mentioned that there are two routes you can take to get to Port Alberni. I'm going to concentrate on the "main" one as it is by far the most popular way to get there. The easiest way to get to Port Alberni is to "fly to Qualicum, turn left, fly past Horne Lake and land."

I'll let you work out the details of the flight plan but essentially you'll fly up island until you pass Qualicum Beach airport.

Shortly after passing Qualicum you'll see a mountain pass on your left side. Head towards the pass and as you approach it you'll see you're flying between Horne Lake (to the north) and Cameron Lake (to the south), essentially following the Alberni Highway. There are a couple of things to watch for as you approach the pass:

- On a good weather day there can be a lot of traffic in this area. Start announcing your position and intentions on the Alberni MF (123.0 MHz at time of writing) before you get to the pass.

(image from archive.copanational.org)

- You'll need to be at about 4500 ft. to cross the pass. Remember to ensure your altitude is appropriate for your direction of flight.

- As you cross the pass and approach Alberni continue to announce your intentions and keep an eye open for gliders – on a nice day they're everywhere.

After you cross the pass and the valley starts to open up, stay to the north (traffic permitting) and you'll see the airport. Follow the Uncontrolled Aerodrome procedures to overfly the field, join the circuit and land. When you're overflying the field be aware that, unlike some uncontrolled airports that keep both downwind legs on one side of the runway, both runways at Port Alberni are a standard left hand circuit, which means the downwind leg will be on either side of the runway, depending on the wind.

After landing, taxi to the terminal building area to park.

Local Knowledge

Flying up to Port Alberni really isn't complicated however there are a few things to be aware of that you may not find in the CFS:

- The windsock is near the centre of the runway, not at either end, so if you overfly the centre of the airport you won't see the windsock.

- As mentioned above, Alberni Regional is a popular gliding spot. You may find the runway is temporarily unavailable because of glider ops. (Another good reason for giving plenty of notice of your intention to land.)

- You may find it a bit bumpy if you're flying close to the ridge to the east of the airport.

- Alberni Valley Regional Airport NOTAMS are listed under Nanaimo. DO check the NOTAMS as occasionally the airport is closed because of special events like drag racing.

Weather

There's no METAR / TAF for Port Alberni so you have to rely on the GFA and reports from other airports for weather information. Comox is the closest airport with a METAR / TAF so it's a good start; you can also look at Tofino to get an idea of what weather may be inbound. Port Alberni does have a weather cam that will give you a good idea of current conditions. Other local weather factors to be aware of include:

- Port Alberni is in a valley at the end of an ocean inlet so be watchful of weather coming up the inlet.

- It can get quite hot in Port Alberni so be prepared for turbulence and density altitude calculations

- It's not unusual to see cloud sitting over the pass between Horne and Cameron Lakes. Resist the urge to try and sneak under it to get into Port Alberni; it may be possible BUT you really want to be sure of the weather on the other side. Heading to Qualicum for a bowl of soup is a much better plan.

Important Links & Contacts

Coulson Flying Tankers:
www.martinmars.com/index.htm

Vancouver Island Soaring Centre:
visc.wqs.ca/

Alberni Valley Soaring Assoc.:
www.avsa.ca

Alberni Flying Club:
alberniflyingclub.blogspot.ca/