

Campbell River – not just for fishing

LIISA ATVA, SPECIAL TO THE PROVINCE | 12.01.2014



A small forest of chainsaw wood carvings was created on the Rotary Seawalk. Liisa Atva/For the Province

“I have never seen a river that I could not love.” Heartfelt words by Roderick Haig-Brown (1908-1976), a Canadian author, angler and

conservationist admired internationally for his writing on fly fishing and the natural world. Certainly included in that love would have been the Campbell River, upon whose banks he settled and, perhaps as well, the town that bears that river's name.

A self-proclaimed Salmon Capital of the World, Campbell River draws sports fishermen from around the globe. But as I discovered during a two-day visit, there's more to this Vancouver Island city of 31,000 than fishing. With roots in logging and fishing, Campbell River is quintessentially small town B.C. — and its attractions reflect that.

Approaching from the south, along the Old Highway, an inviting paved pathway emerged between the road and shores of Discovery Passage. The Rotary Seawalk — perfect for biking or rollerblading — stretches 5.5 km to the city centre and offers views of driftwood-strewn beaches, kayakers, sailboats, fishing vessels and Alaska-bound cruise ships.

Near the beginning of the Seawalk, at Frank James Park, was a small forest of two- to three-metre high woodcarvings. Created during the July 1 Shoreline Arts competition, the detail and artistry of the varied carvings — eagles, bears, mythical creatures, human faces and a giant teapot — is surprising, considering they were carved out of cedar and fir stumps with chainsaws.

At the other end of the Seawalk is the Maritime Heritage Centre. Completed in 2004 on the site of 'Old Stinky,' an abandoned sewage treatment tank, the bright and airy Centre is home to two famous boats. One, a restored BCP45 Seine fishing boat, was the subject of a contest-winning photo taken by George Hunter that subsequently graced the back of the Canadian \$5 bill from 1972-86. The boat, the Margaret M, is a small but functional 14-foot sailboat featured in Ripley's Believe it or Not for having been built by a one-armed blind man, Arthur Barnes. Take advantage of the Centre's free-guided tours. Our guide, local historian and photographer Brian Kyle's enthusiasm and storytelling added a dimension that reading exhibit signage could never do.

Not fishing doesn't mean not encountering fish. At the Quinsam River Hatchery, seven minutes from town, the cacophony of seagulls and the sight of eagles circling above the Douglas Firs herald what lies beyond. Along the trail towards the river, bear warning signs and salmon carcasses — bare bones with head still intact — had me peering ahead cautiously. The best time to see the salmon running is September to November. In early September, the river was so flush with fish that old-

timers tales of ‘walking across rivers on the backs of salmon’ almost seemed possible. I watched fish trying to jump three times their length up fish ladders and wondered why it had to be so hard.

I didn’t try it, but heard snorkelling with the salmon is a popular local pastime. And if you really want to see bears, Campbell River is the closest point to Vancouver, Seattle and Victoria for grizzly-watching tours to the Great Bear Rainforest on the B.C. mainland.

Although I didn’t stay at the beautiful setting that is Painter’s Lodge — no room at the inn — that didn’t stop me from enjoying their facilities. Lunch on the restaurant patio overlooking Discovery Passage was their delicious signature salad; lettuce and julienne vegetables, chunks of their own housed smoked salmon, sun-dried blueberries, and toasted pecans — still warm. After lunch, I embarked on a 10-minute cruise aboard the lodge’s free shuttle to its sister resort on Quadra Island, the April Point Resort and Spa. There, I found another restaurant with an equally beautiful view looking back toward Vancouver Island with Mount Washington as the backdrop.

I saved one of the best attractions, the Museum at Campbell River, for last. The First Nations gallery includes a dramatic presentation of the Treasures of Siwidi. Sitting in a small darkened theatre, listening to the soothing voice of a local chief recount ancient stories of supernatural sea creatures as various masks and carvings were illuminated, was a sensory immersion into First Nations culture.

The most moving exhibit was a depiction of the impact foreign diseases had on the First Nations people — a display of 100 small human figures, then every couple of seconds a few lights would go out, until there only 10 left.

The Museum’s transition from First Nations to European influenced

history is exemplified by two photos displayed side by side. One shows a gathering of chiefs of the house of Kwakwaka’wakw in Alert Bay in 1906. The other is of members of Parliament in Victoria in 1875.

Logging, fishing and pioneer history were also well represented in unique ways; machine parts from ‘logging in the jungles,’ Campbell River’s mascot Mr. Tyee and old fish cans depicting how runs of sockeye have given way to pink and chum.

A half-dozen attractions covered in two days at a relaxed pace — the beauty of small places. A couple from Saskatchewan at the Maritime Heritage Centre said of their trip to B.C., “We spend most of our time visiting smaller towns and always find lots to see.”

This Week's Flyers

Three promotional flyers are displayed horizontally. The first flyer on the left is for 'SHARE & SAVE FARE' with the slogan 'food is our passion' and a 'CLICK FOR FLYER' button. The middle flyer is for 'Cooper's Foods' featuring images of salmon and other food items, with a price tag of '7.99 ea' and a 'CLICK FOR FLYER' button. The right flyer is for 'BLACK FRIDAY' with various appliance deals, including a refrigerator for '\$1348' and a microwave for '\$798', and a 'CLICK FOR FLYER' button.

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