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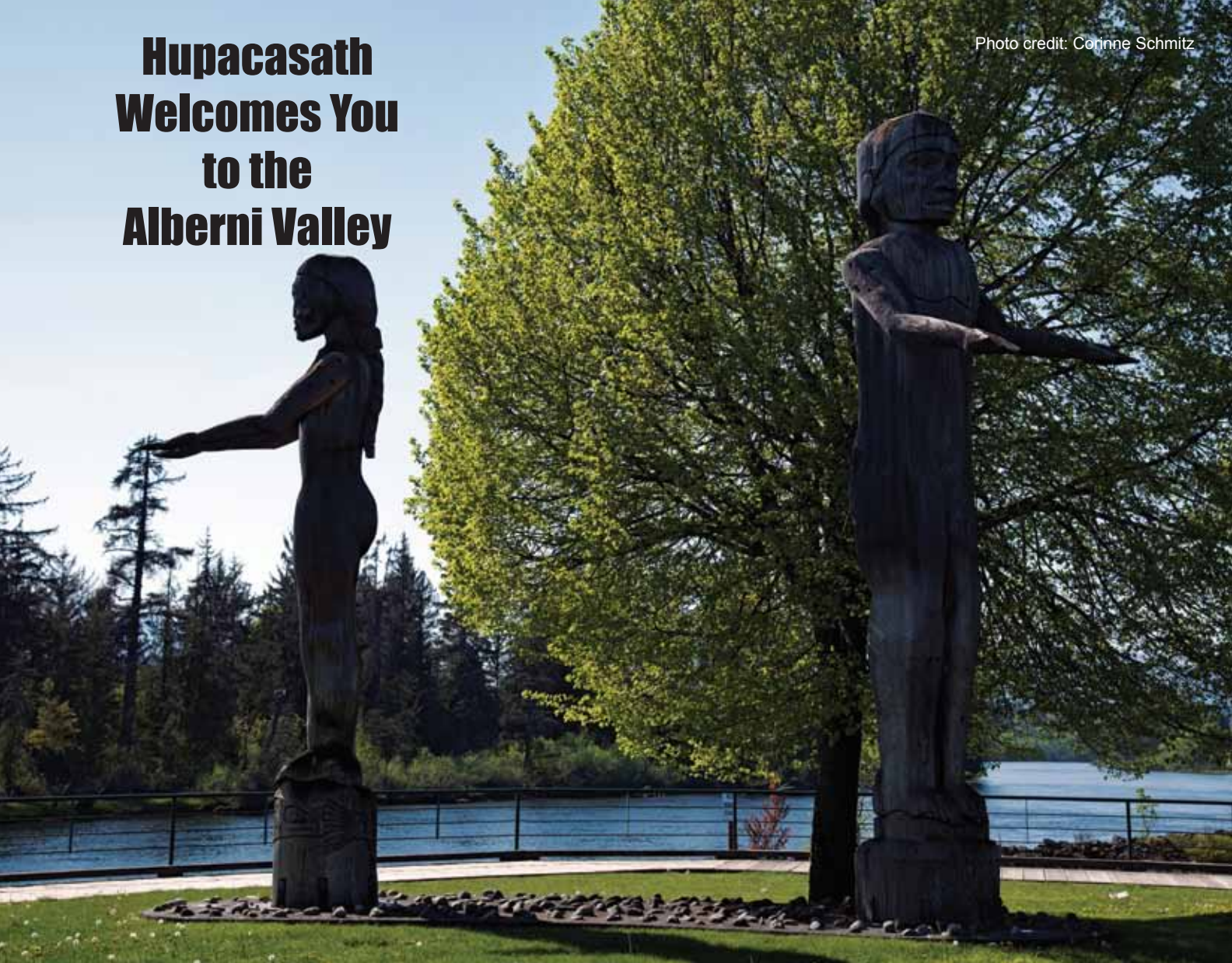
GARDENING
TIPS

#EXPLORE
PORTALBERNI



**Hupacasath
Welcomes You
to the
Alberni Valley**

Photo credit: Corinne Schmitz



For thousands of years the Hupacasath people have owned, used, and occupied their traditional territory on Central Vancouver Island. The Hupacasath are comprised of three distinct tribes, the Muh-uulth-aht, Kleh-koot-aht and Cuu-ma-as-aht (Ahahswinis).

Hupacasath has never made Totem Poles like most of the west coast First Nations. Instead their long houses were decorated with carvings and paintings. They did, however, have Welcome figures placed along trails and waterways to mark the entryways. Today, two large carvings stand tall at the Victoria Quay, on the bottom of Johnston Road with arms stretched out to Welcome people into their territory from the land and from the water. The male, which was carved first, faces the highway welcoming people into the valley. The female faces the water, which was historically the highway of the First Nation people, welcoming the neighbours from the Barclay Sound.



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Welcome to Port Alberni

#EXPLOREPORTALBERNI

In the heart of Vancouver Island, cloaked in emerald moss and connected by the ancient sea, sits a valley filled with opportunity, adventure and wonderment.

As the community fortunate enough to be surrounded by the towering peaks of the Beaufort Mountain Range, lush canopies of the west coast rainforest and salty waters of the Alberni Inlet, we have the privilege of showing each other and the world just how lucky we are.

So, to the residents looking to rekindle their sense of adventure, the young and the young at heart, we invite you to lace up your hiking boots, dust off your kayaks, polish your golf clubs, grab your fishing rods and pack your cameras - it's time to roam near home and explore Port Alberni.



PHOTO - DAN FREDLAND

Photo credit: Jane Roth

Trailblazing in the Alberni Valley

By Nicole Brazzale & Ali Penko



Spring in the Valley is a magical time as we all emerge from hibernation, eager to bathe in the warmer weather.

The first signs of spring can be seen in the colourful tulips, sunshine yellow daffodils, and vibrant wildflowers blooming, lifting the Valley out of its cold, grey, winter slumber. Spring brings a sense of warmth and excitement, inviting us outside again, reminding us of the beautiful place we call home.

While spring often brings more rain, there is a beautiful sense of rebirth as the forest drinks in the warmer showers and glimpses of sunlight. The ferns come alive, vibrantly green, the moss holds onto the droplets, glistening in the light. The muddy trails invite us back to our youth, jumping in puddles with

joy in our hearts. The spring blooms invite us to take a moment and appreciate the breathtaking flowers, reminding us that summer is just around the corner. As the sky lightens and the days lengthen, we are reborn and renewed.

Living in Port Alberni is a lifestyle, we're surrounded by mountains and old growth forests inviting us to explore. Whether hiking, walking, running, horseback riding, biking, or 4x4ing, the trails await.

The Log Train Trail is ideal for all ages and fitness levels. It dates back to the early 1900's, it was originally developed as part of the Bainbridge Mill rail-logging operation. This trail has many entrance points, travelling 25km throughout the Valley. Much of this trail is canopied with old and new growth

trees, often feeling never ending, in the best way possible, as you venture through our magical rainforest.

One of the many entrance points of the Log Train Trail connects to McLeans Mill, called Shadow Loop Trail. Entering through the mill, looping parallel to the Log Train Trail, over creeks (which may be flooded depending on the weather), surrounded by evergreens, ferns, sitka trees, and once popular poplar trees. The moss covered forest feels like stepping into something magical and out of this world, before looping back to the Log Train Trail and logged open spaces.

Another entrance point to the Log Train Trail is Rogers Creek, either from Burde St or the Port Alberni Hwy. Rogers Creek Trails offer a spectacular view into the changing seasons. The ferns brighten, moss intensifies, and wildflowers pop up sporadically throughout the greenery. Explore Beaver Pond and witness the beavers making progress on their den, through teeth marks on surrounding trees and their den in the middle of the pond. Stay on the Log Train Trail down to the creek, where the water runs crystal clear and free.

Wherever you decide to explore, getting into nature is always beneficial to your overall health. Walking, hiking, and biking are all low impact activities that help improve your cardiovascular system, strengthening your heart and lungs. Practice being mindful by engaging all your senses while in the forest; breathe deeply, touch the foliage, ground yourself in the strength of the trees, and take in the breathtaking sights and vibrant colours.

Hitting the trails is also a safe way to connect with friends. The trails make it easy to social distance while visiting with those you might not be able to see otherwise. Being active with others builds comradery and deep connection, especially when outdoors. After the year we've had, being out on the trails with others brings a sense of normalcy in an otherwise abnormal year.

In and among the trails you will find adventurers on land and water. These local clubs are trailblazing their own way through the valley. The main purpose of all the groups is Safety, Outdoor Recreation, Community and Fun!

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Photo credit: Sharlene Patterson

The Riders of Alberni Valley known as ROAV is a mountain biking group currently in a reboot of their club. Originally they came together to share their passion for the sport of mountain biking, to build trails, and compete in competitions both locally and throughout BC.

Their current mandate is to develop relationships with landowners and First Nations groups to support the interests of all parties, including land use and cultural heritage. The group is looking to diversify their ridership, hoping to introduce mountain biking to a wider range of participants. ROAV plans to offer workshops and organized rides to members of all abilities. The group has a long-term goal of creating a regional adventure park/ skate park.

With current COVID restrictions they want to encourage exercise and riding safely. Mountain biking as a sport lends itself to social distancing, "In fact that is what you want", says Marc LaBrie, president of ROAV. "You can ride within the guidelines, maintain distance, which the sport naturally lends itself to for safety".

Alberni Motocross is another trailblazing group in the valley. The club began in 1967 and moved to its current location on Cherry Creek Road in 1981. The group has a recreational land lease with Mosaic Forest Management, which gives them access rights

to the dirt bike track and a key to the gate.

The purpose of the group is to enjoy the sport of motocross, in a safe environment and as a community. They currently have a membership of over 75 people, aged 4 years to 70+ and has a good mix of male and female riders of all abilities.

The club hosts racing competitions, training programs, workshops. It is an outdoor organization and encourages family activities like work bees to maintain the track and social gathering like campfires and bbqs. The first races of the season are scheduled for April 10th and 11 at their track on Cherry Creek Road. Contact Alberni Motocross at alberniavalleymx@gmail.com.

Sproat Lake Canoe Club began in 2003 with 10 canoe enthusiasts who pooled their money together to buy an outrigger canoe. They currently have a small fleet, a 45 ft. 6 seat Polynesian style outrigger, a 4 seater, 2 seater and single boats.

This group offers paddling opportunities 6 or 7 times a week on Sproat Lake. A paddle is usually around 1 hour in length. The requirements for joining are that you must know how to swim and have some upper body strength. You are also required to participate in a capsizing exercise, called a Huli, where the boat is flipped over with paddlers in it and righted again. This activity is done in order to be prepared for an emergency.


The Canoe Club is part of CORA, (Canadian Outrigger Racing Association) and hosts and participates in competitions around the island. Under current COVID restrictions they are not running any club activities but are hoping to restart this spring and summer. Contact Angela for more information. angeladb@telus.net




Photo credit: Sharlene Patterson






The Alberni Hill Climbers is a group of All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) enthusiasts who enjoy getting out with a focus on promoting safe and responsible ATVing in BC. The group formed in 2004 with 5 or 6 ATVs and has grown to 90+ members. They are part of a larger organization, ATVBC, a provincial club, whose mandate is "Understanding the need for leadership in sustainability, safety training and environmental awareness." ATVBC and its members advocate for shared trails through responsible use, collaboration with other user groups and volunteer contribution around the province of BC. The benefits of joining include a 25% discount on insurance, safety training, monthly rides, events and meeting new people with similar interests.

Although not currently organizing events due to COVID restrictions, The Alberni Hill Climbers are hoping to be able to resume organized events by the end of the summer. Rather than competitions, The Hill Climbers offer monthly rides, 1 or 2 a month. The rides are tailored to the ages and abilities of the group. They are between 4-8 hours long and are to different locations around the valley. The organized rides take place on the weekends to keep away from active logging operations. They also offer a two-part safety-training course with certified instructors so that you can learn how to be safe out there on the trails. For more information go Online at ATVBC website, or contact Len Cherry at cherryven@shaw.ca □



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Spring is in the Air!

HERE ARE SOME QUICK TIPS TO HELP ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL GROWING SEASON.

By Ali Penko

Let's talk tools.

What tools do you have? What shape are they in? Good, sharp tools are the key to getting the job done effectively and with the least amount of strain on your body. Your basic tool kit should include a round mouth shovel, a metal spring-loaded rake, a garden fork, a trowel, sharp and oiled hand pruners and loppers, a saw and a wheelbarrow. Other important tools are properly fitting gloves, kneepads and a good hat. If you are looking to replace your tools, make

sure that they are made of quality materials and that you feel good using them.

Let's talk lawns.

Lawn - Make sure that your equipment is tuned up for the season ahead. Change the oil, air filter and spark plug. Clean out old grass stuck inside and sharpen the blade. If there are too many dings and gouges in your blade, replace it. Fill the gas tank with fresh fuel.

Raking is not only great for your lawn, it's great for getting your body in shape. Use a spring loaded rake with long metal tines. This pulls up the thatch, which is a top layer of organic matter, mostly dead grass, left over from years past. If the thatch layer gets too thick it will create a barrier, which reduces drainage and makes it difficult for new grass blades to emerge.

Aerate your lawn. This is excellent for every lawn. It reduces compaction, improves drainage and allows water and nutrients to pass through the soil more easily. It also allows the grass roots to grow deeper. Aerating helps with moss, standing water and dead zones. The process uses a machine to remove cores of soil. Rake the soil cores over the lawn.

Moss - Can be a sign of poor drainage but also acidic soil. Add lime to create a more balanced pH in your soil. Grass does best in neutral soil.

The key is choosing a quality seed for your particular lawn conditions. We live in an area where cool season grasses are grown and some do better in the sun and others in the shade. Getting the grass growing thick to eliminate bare spots where weed seeds can grow. This will reduce the need for commercial pesticides.

A composting and mulching blade on your mower allows you to use the grass clippings as a fertilizer source. You just cut the grass and leave the clippings. Alternatively, if you are using a chemical fertilizer, look for a slow release fertilizer that is high in nitrogen. The nitrogen content is the first number on the box. For example 28-3-10, would be a good choice for your lawn.

Grass often gets cut shorter than it should. 3+ inches is a good height for spring because it gets rid of any winter damage and prepares the lawn for the new growing season. 3.5- 4" in summer, which helps to shade the soil, allowing it to retain water and reduces weed growth. Cut grass to 2.5" in the fall before the first frost. Adjust the wheels on the mower to adjust the blade height, make sure they are all adjusted to the same height.

The key to watering is depth not frequency. A healthy lawn needs the top 6 inches wet, the length of the grass roots, which equals about an inch of water per week. This is called a deep watering,

The best way to water your lawn is early in the

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morning, before 10am in the morning or in the afternoon between 4-6pm, this allows the evaporation to be kept at a minimum. It also allows your grass to keep cool over the heat of the day. Watering in the evening keeps the lawn wet overnight and susceptible to fungus and disease.

One way to test how long it takes to water an inch is to place empty cans in various areas of the lawn while watering and time how long it takes to fill one inch of water. That is how long you need to water in the future.

Let's talk veggies - Getting the garden ready for planting vegetables can be done in late winter and includes cleaning out the garden of last years' plants, adding compost and making a plan.

Wait until the soil has dried out a bit before stepping onto it. Walking all over a squishy garden, increases compaction in the soil, which is detrimental to the plants. Clean up your plot by removing any plants from last year and giving your garden a light raking. When the soil is dry enough that it crumbles in your hand, it's time to add 1-2 inches of compost and then till either by hand, with your garden fork, or with a tilling machine. Create mounds of soil in rows.

Planning your bounty is next. Think about what has done well in the past and what hasn't. Most importantly, think about what you actually like to eat. Veggies can be planted, as seeds or seedlings and there are advantages to each method.

Choosing seeds give you access to more plant varieties and you have more control of the process. They also give you the opportunity to stagger your crops for continuous yield, instead of having everything ripen at the same time. Vegetable seeds are viable between 2 and 5 years and are fun to share with your friends and neighbours.

Seedlings are great too! Having the plants already germinated and already growing helps in the planting process and spacing of the plants. The selection of plant varieties is usually based on proven winners, plants that do well in your area.

Spending time working in your yard is a great way to learn new things, get exercise and connect with nature. Each new season is different from the last. Get out there and have fun! ☐



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THE HISTORY — OF THE — CAMERON LAKE RESORT

BY GLEN A. MOFFORD



One of the biggest omissions from my last book, *Along the E&N: A Journey Back to the Historic Hotels of Vancouver Island*, was not to include the Cameron Lake Chalet. The Canadian Pacific Railway hotel was constructed along the Alberni extension of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E&N) railway between 1910 and 1911 as a resort and train station. The location was perfect as it provided a beautiful recreational area for guests and day trippers.

Cameron Lake is named after Hon. David Cameron, Chief Justice of Vancouver Island appointed by Governor James Douglas in 1856. In 1909 the Canadian Pacific Railway, who owned the E&N, laid track to the eastern edge of Cameron Lake, west of Parksville on their way to the Alberni Valley. The modest ten-room Cameron Lake Hotel was built in 1911 and opened in May 1912 to accommodate the anticipated arrival of tourists. Although constructed by the CPR, the modest resort was not considered a part of the grand hotels system.

The Cameron Lake Chalet proved popular in its inaugural season (1912). Besides offering attractive lodgings beside a pristine lake, guest could take a boat out onto the lake, go swimming, picnic on the

verdant green lawns, or simply relax in the quiet setting. There was also excellent trout fishing on the lake. For those up for a challenge there were well-marked trails surrounding the resort with the most daunting being a 15-mile hike up to the summit of Mt. Arrowsmith. The chalet was base camp for hikers and Alpinists who arrived by train to take on the challenge. A special seasonal rate from Nanaimo to Cameron Lake station and chalet costs adults \$4.60 return.

The first manager of the chalet was Miss Jean Mollison who had experience operating various hotels. She was followed by Mr. and Mrs. Monks. Mr. and Mrs. Woollett became the next to manager the Chalet after operating the Somass Hotel in Port Alberni for a number of years.

“Cameron Lake Chalet is a Delightful Resort... Mr. George Woollett, the manager of the Chalet, is very well known up and down the Pacific coast... he was Chief Stewart with the CPR coastal service for forty-six years. Mrs. Woollett is assisting in the management and personally presides over all the dining-room arrangements, thus assuring all guests the pleasure of perfectly cooked and served meals.



the years. For the next fifty-four seasons the chalet provided guests with a comfortable resort set in a quiet and beautiful recreational setting. But time also took its toll on the chalet as it became run down. That, and the fact that automobile traffic had increased and most bypassed the lake heading east or west, eventually led to the close of the historic hotel.

Today as we pursue our busy lives, most drive quickly past Cameron Lake. The chalet is long gone, demolished in 1969 but those who stop are rewarded with a refreshing walk along the sandy shore and enjoy the same marvelous view that guests of the resort saw while gazing out from the verandah of the Cameron Lake Chalet all those years ago.

One can reach the chalet by automobile or the E&N train that stops right at the front door.” The Chalet had five guest bedrooms on each of two floors. A baggage room ran alongside the railroad tracks in the back and the dining room stretched along the south side with wide verandahs on two sides overlooking the lake and the mountains beyond. Inside was a welcoming lobby with a large brick fireplace.

New owners and managers came and went through

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THE SALVATION ARMY SERVING OUR COMMUNITY FOR OVER 75 YEARS

The Salvation Army first came to Canada in 1882, after being founded in London, England in 1865. The original concept of the Salvation Army came from William Booth, whose philosophy was “soup, soap, and salvation” for those in need; it has since developed into comprehensive social service programs, and is now the largest non-government direct provider of social services, serving more than 1.9 million people in 400 communities in Canada.

The Port Alberni branch has been serving the community for 75 years, originally opening in 1946. The unique part of the Salvation Army is that they truly focus on all aspects of wellbeing; offering spiritual, physical, and emotional support to its patrons. They have teamed up with our local Canadian Mental Health Association, Literacy Alberni, KUU-US Crisis Line, as well as the Bread of Life, which has allowed them to serve even more of the community.

When COVID-19 hit a year ago the Salvation Army and the Bread of Life teamed up to support our community. They have served over 110,000 meals since then, and are feeding upwards of 400 people a day. While changes have been made in the way they operate, the original philosophy of “soup, soap, and salvation” has held strong. They have brought in a mobile kitchen unit from Gibsons, BC which has allowed them to serve those in the community that are unable to get to the location on Argyle St. or have no fixed address.

Teaming up with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Literacy BC, and KUU-US Crisis Line is paramount in helping those struggling in the

For more than 100 years The Salvation Army has counted on volunteers to support its work in our community.



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community. Unfortunately, mental health can often be overlooked while trying to solve homeless and addiction problems within communities. Combining all resources like food, shelter, clothing, spirituality, and mental health is incredibly important for actually helping those in need. The Salvation Army does a great job of looking at the entire picture and attaining the resources they need to support our community.

Something that is very important to the Salvation Army is providing a space where people can maintain dignity. There is a lot of judgement and shame surrounding those who need support from food banks and other donations. It can be an incredibly humiliating process, which is why the Salvation Army is constantly working on providing situations and services that allow their patrons that sense of dignity. The most recent initiative in the Alberni Valley is it's very own Food Cupboard located outside Jericho Church. The idea behind the Food Cupboard came from the community library boxes where, instead of donating or taking books, people can donate or take food and other basic things. Located at the 5100 block of Tebo Avenue, it serves those who might not be able to access the Salvation Army. People are welcome to stock the Food Cupboard themselves or drop donations off at 4835 Argyle St.

Looking forward, the Salvation Army has big plans. They have recently purchased a refrigerated truck which will allow them to serve communities further West, like Tofino and Ucluelet. They have also proposed to take over the Beaufort Hotel which they hope will provide housing and a pay what you can grocery store, cafe, and restaurant.

The Salvation Army team would like to extend a massive thank you to the community for all the donations and support they've received, especially during this past year. If you would like to support them you can volunteer, donate money, non-perishable and perishable foods, clothing, and any winter gear will be passed along to the Warming Centre.

KUU-US Crisis Line can be reached toll-free at 1-800-588-8717. Alternatively, individuals can call directly into the Youth Line at 250-723-2040 or the Adult Line at 250-723-4050. □

THE ROTARY CLUB'S 13TH ANNUAL BANNER PROJECT



The Rotary Arts District, which goes from the Rollin Arts Centre along Argyle Street to the Harbour Quay is gearing up to host it's 13th annual Banner Project, put on by the Alberni-Arrowsmith Rotary Club. This is an exciting event for the entire community, allowing local artists to showcase their skills from May until September.

What first began as an idea to help enhance South Port back in 2008, this project has grown from just 20 banners in year one, to 82 banners plus a waitlist now. The idea originally came from the Nanaimo Arts District, where they offer a similar project to their community. The original intent behind the banner project was to revitalize the South Port area of Port Alberni, which was once the main hub of the Valley.

It was very important to the Rotary Club to keep the Banner Project in the South Port area, for many reasons. This area is well known for its visual and performing arts, with the Rollin Arts Centre and the Capitol Theatre. It is also an area that is often missed by tourists traveling through town, as most utilize Johnson St. This is a way to attract people down Argyle and to our beautiful Harbour Quay, all while showcasing the talent that Port Alberni has to offer.

Over the years, the Rotary Club has hosted the banner painting project at Glenwood Centre, local schools and care homes, bringing all the supplies needed to a designated facility in the community. When COVID-19 made large gatherings unsafe,

Larry McGifford and Pam Craig had to make a decision; cancel the project all together or pivot and adapt. They quickly recognized what an integral part the Banner Project plays within the community, so they adapted the project to fit in with our current health and safety guidelines, bringing the banner and supplies to participants' homes, where they can create their masterpieces.

With all change comes uncertainty, but Larry and Pam have worked their magic allowing people to participate from the comfort of their homes, they've found that it has allowed even more people to participate, especially those who might not have felt comfortable pre pandemic to paint around others. They have put together kits which include everything you'd need to create a piece of art; paint, brushes, banner stretcher and stand, as well as the banner itself. They drop off the supplies and pick up the finished piece, making the whole process simple and efficient.

The Banner Painting Project is for artists of all ages and levels, and the Rotary Club does an amazing job of allowing these artists the freedom to create whatever their hearts desire. They leave all the creative work up to the local artists. This project is much more than just "painting a banner", over the years this project has allowed artists of all ages and skill levels to showcase their talents, which helps build confidence and brings people together. Every banner is different as the artists transfers part of themselves into the canvas, telling a unique and personalized story. □

The Vancouver Island Trail

By Ali Penko



Photo credit: Ali Penko

The Vancouver Island Trail is a new trail that spans the length of Vancouver Island and is approximately 770km long. Originally called The Spine Trail, the project was conceived by a man named Gil Parker in 2009.

Mr. Parker, an avid hiker and mountaineer, was inspired to create the Vancouver Island Trail after completing The Pacific Crest Trail at 68 years old. The Pacific Crest Trail is 4265km long and spans the US from Mexico to Canada and travels through California, Oregon and Washington. Parker dreamed of a trail that would connect communities, provide recreation and adventure opportunities and showcase the diversity of Vancouver Island. His idea was to connect existing trails within each community to create one continuous trail the length of the island.

The Vancouver Island Trail begins at Anderson Park in Victoria, as an inlet trail and ends in Cape Scott, as a coastal trail. It is estimated to take 2 to 3 months to complete in its entirety. The construction of the trail has been a huge undertaking and includes land use agreements with public land managers, provincial, regional and local governments, Crown land, First Nations, and private land managers. The trail is currently 85% complete and offers over 40 km of hiking opportunities in the Port Alberni area alone.

The Port Alberni sections include the Inlet Trail,

the Log Train Trail and a trail into the Beaufort Mountains. These can be enjoyed as day trips or multi day trips and there are opportunities for hikers of all skill levels.

The Inlet Trail Stage 1 is a 14 km, non-motorized trail that travels from Ship Creek to China Creek. The hike is rated moderate in difficulty but has some challenging sections. Travel time is approximately 6 hours one way. The trailhead begins at a parking lot on Ship Creek Road and rises to a lookout with views of Mount Arrowsmith and the City of Port Alberni. The trail is long with lots of ups and downs but with some scenic spots and can be hiked in all seasons.



Photo credit: Ali Penko

The Inlet Trail Stage 2 is a 9.8 km trail from China Creek to Franklin River. It is rated as a moderate hike for non-motorized recreation with minimal elevation gain. This hike takes approximately 3.5 hours one way. It is the shortest and easiest section of the Inlet Trail and can be hiked in all seasons.

The Inlet Trail Stage 3 runs between the mouth of the Franklin River and the beginning of the Runner's Trail, near Headquarters Bay and is about 7 km one way. Currently, the trail is severed from Inlet trails 1 and 2, due to the lack of a bridge crossing the Franklin River. The trail can be accessed with a detour on several logging roads. More information can be found on the Vancouver Island Trail website.

The total length of The Log Train Trail is 25km but only 7.5km is part of the Vancouver Island Trail. This is an old railroad line that runs along the foot of the Beaufort Range. The tracks and ties have been removed, leaving a mostly gentle sloping trail that is suitable for hiking, cycling and equestrian use that passes through private forest lands and small farms. The trail is accessed from Hwy # 4 via Maebelle and Mozart Roads.

The Beaufort Crest Route, a route in progress, is a challenging trail for experienced hikers that begins at the 7.5km mark along the Log Train Trail close to the McLean Mill. Completion of this trail is estimated soon after the snow melts this summer. This trail consists of a substantial climb up from the Alberni Valley and then follows a relatively high elevation route through subalpine forests. It includes extensive meadows and wildflower displays, lakes and ponds, until eventually descending into Cumberland. This trail often experiences conditions of poor visibility. Be prepared before you embark on this section of the trail.

All of the construction and maintenance of the trail is by volunteers and users of the trails do so at their own risk.

Alberni Valley is called The Valley of Trails for a reason. There are countless opportunities to get out into nature even within the city limits. It is our own responsibility to make sure that we are prepared for the unexpected. Ask yourself if you are prepared to spend the night outdoors. Remember to do your research and make sure you are properly prepared.

□

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Fishing Town Tales Hold True

Port Alberni has been designated as the Salmon Capital of the World and the World Fishing Network's - Ultimate Fishing Town

By Mike Youds

A friendly rivalry between Port Alberni and Campbell River over the title of Salmon Fishing Capital still sparks a hearty debate among anglers.

“I have a brother-in-law in Campbell River and I tease him all the time,” says Bob Cole, a lifelong Port Alberni angler and boating enthusiast. The two Vancouver Island fishing destinations have much in common. Both are seaports and forestry towns that originated as Indigenous settlements going back millennia, rich cultures borne of a close relationship with the sea.

Both towns are famous for salmon fishing and especially for big springs, chinook or “smileys” when over 20 lbs. Both have tyee clubs. Campbell River’s is known for its annual rowing derby going back to 1925. Alberni Valley Tyee Club was founded seven years later, though its derby has always been open to power boats.

There are some distinctions, of course. Alberni Valley, Alberni Inlet and Barkley Sound offer not only great salmon fishing but an unrivalled variety of recreational fishing opportunities, saltwater and freshwater. Fishing has long been integral to local culture and traditions.

In 2010, the old rivalry took a decisive turn. World Fishing Network held a contest for Canada’s Ultimate Fishing Town. Among 160 entries, Port Alberni won by 30,000 votes. Cole doubts a resident population of 25,000 could have swayed the result without a lot of support from outside the community.

Catch numbers alone tell the story.

“We catch between six and eight times the number of salmon they do out of Campbell River,” Cole said, citing combined results of numeration, creel surveys and flyovers. “I don’t think it’s been any lower than five times.”

Another factor favouring the Central Island is ease of access. Port Alberni is known on the B.C. coast as a small-boat-and-trailer destination, a relatively short drive from other Island centres, in contrast with more distant salmon fishing opportunities on the west coast.

For as long as there have been people living on the Central Island, there has been fishing. Proof of this

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Photo credit: Zenseekers Chris Istac

“We have more salmon kilometres than any salmon river in North America because it’s such a short river system,” Cole said.

Port Alberni is known as a small-boat-and-trailer place — a fairly short trip from other Island centres — in contrast with far-flung west coast salmon fishing destinations on the Island. Part of the appeal is ease of access to the outer inlet and beyond.

“In Port Alberni’s favour, the best thing we still have is Robertson Creek,” says Doug Lindores, who operates Slivers Charters. “And people have been instrumental in building small streams with coho.”

Robertson Creek Hatchery, located on the Upper Stamp River, has substantially boosted the rivers’ natural production and helps to sustain commercial, First Nations and recreational fishing opportunities.

“We have few or no restrictions because the returns of fish are much larger,” Cole says. On the inside waters of the Salish Sea, anglers typically face more fishing restrictions, he notes.

There are unique factors that lend substance to the capital claim. As one example, Cole cites nearby Nahmint River, which still has a steelhead fishery and “where you used to see the real monster chinook, the six- and seven-year-olds.” A theory holds that the Nahmint chinook stock withstood the last ice age, unlike chinook elsewhere.

“By DNA, they found that the fish from the Nahmint River repopulated all the rivers from here to Alaska,” he explains. “That’s a pretty amazing story. They’re quite iconic in many ways.”

Nahmint Bay is closed to fishing to protect the stock, but they have made substantial progress on restoring productivity, transplanting brood stock in the lower river. Further down Alberni Inlet lies Barkley Sound, though, which offers superb fishing year-round.

David Murphy grew up fishing in Port Alberni. His father once managed Clutesi Haven Marina. He fondly remembers fishing “as a 14-year-old, in a tin boat, catching a 42-pounder in the harbour.”

“Everyone had a boat. The whole town fished. It’s what you did,” he recalls.

Murphy has made fishing his career as a guide and lodge operator. Though Murphy Sportfishing Charters operates primarily on the outer west coast now, Murphy returns for summer steelhead in Port Alberni.

“There’s probably more steelhead in the Stamp than all other Vancouver Island rivers combined,” he said.

Salmon fishing has changed over the decades. Declines in ocean productivity widely believed to be the result of climate change and increased competition for habitat from ocean ranching have affected local fishing over the last 30 years, Murphy says.

Fishing reports vary from season to season with some saying 2019 was better than 2020. In Campbell River’s favour, fishing last summer was the best seen in 20 years, Murphy notes.

And Port Alberni? The tyee club managed to pull off one of the few fishing derbies held along the coast during a summer when others were cancelled due to pandemic concerns. To be on the safe side, the derby

ran without its usual dockside festival. Tickets still sold out.

Jasken sees plenty of room for improving the event in future, making it more inclusive and fun, reinforcing the Ultimate Fishing Town brand that she spearheaded a decade ago.

“We truly believe we are.” □



Photo credit: Zenseekers Chris Istac

lies along the shore of Sproat Lake — Kleh-koot in the Nuu-chah-nulth language — where petroglyphs 10,000 years old depict various fish, reflecting their importance to first peoples.

Immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries were also drawn to the fishing life. Memories of those social ties are credited with helping to revive the Port Alberni club after a brief hiatus a few years ago. There was a strong desire “to have what we grew up with,” says Carolyn Jasken, club president.

“It used to be a real social hub down at the marinas. We used to have dances, banquets, dinners,” Jasken recalls. “The social aspect was biggest.”

The Somass/Stamp river watershed plays a key role. Due to the rivers’ short length — 24 kilometres in all — fish populations are more concentrated. Great Central Lake and Sproat Lake, two of the largest freshwater bodies on the Island, along with many smaller lakes — Elsie, Gracie and Sumner to name a few — that offer trout fishing in abundance.





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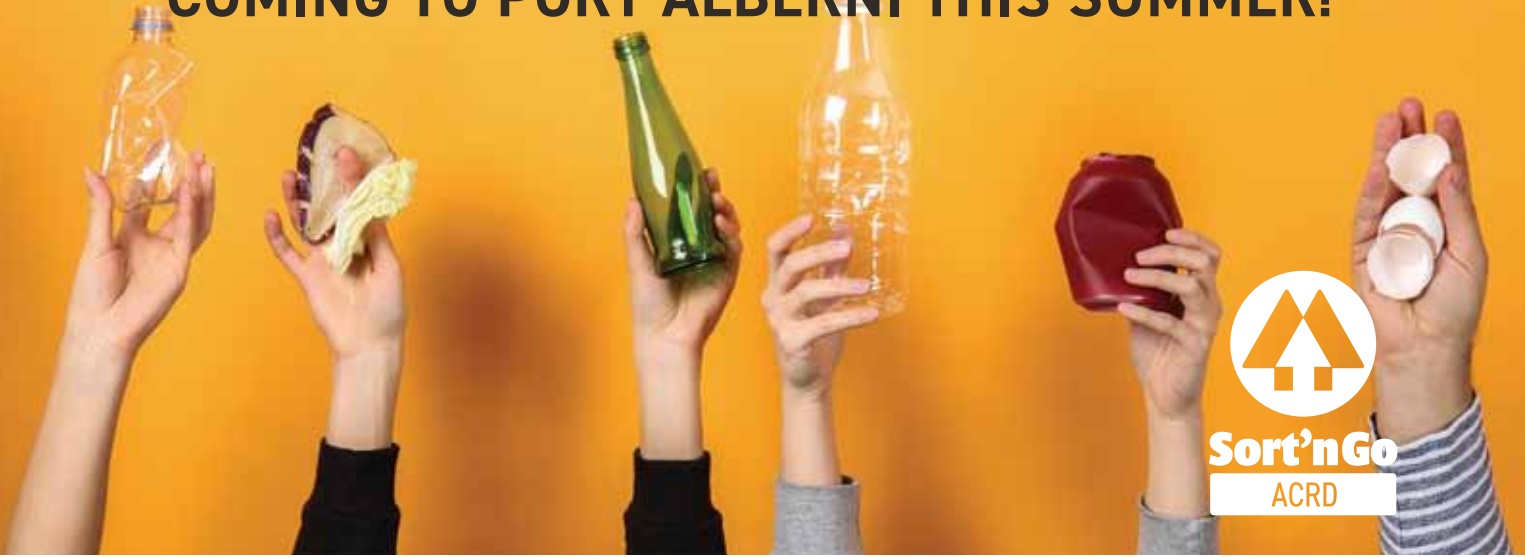
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