



BACKYARD GETAWAYS

SPRING



POWELL RIVER

If you love nature and photography, dogs and people, Powell River is the ticket

BY JANE MUNDY



Fuelled with coffee and the cutest cupcake from 32 Lakes Cafe and Bakery, my dog Roxy and I stroll from Marine Drive (aka “downtown”) to Willingdon Beach where some kids are building sandcastles. We pass a dozen or so people practising Tai Chi and check out turn-of-the-century logging equipment showcasing Powell River’s industrial history to our destination. A bench at the end of a walkway and fishing pier has a sweeping view of the Salish Sea and below, through crystal clear water, the seabed. The bench is dedicated to Ted Crossley, who “loved nature, photography, poetry, people and his dogs from 1947 until 2019.” Ted must have loved Powell River.

I LOVE THE great outdoors but when it comes to serious hiking—that is, more than an hour in the rainforest—my interest wanes. But on my first visit to Powell River, almost a decade ago, I took a four-hour outdoor photography course with resident Darren Robinson and saw nature through a new lens. We hiked the Appleton Creek Trail ▶

The boardwalk from Lund Harbour House to the Boardwalk Restaurant.

BACKYARD GETAWAYS

and shot one waterfall after another. When someone shows you how to look at something in a different light, from another angle, it's amazing what you can see. And I've been shooting on a manual setting ever since.

On my second trip I met Eagle Walz, president at Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society and co-founder of the Sunshine Coast Trail (SCT). "If you hike to Fairview Bay—which should have been named Oyster Bay—all you'll need is an oyster shucker and beverage of choice," Eagle says, laughing. We struck black gold on that hike—wild mushrooms galore and all we needed was a Coleman stove, skillet and spatula.

"We just finished building our 15th cabin on the SCT and hope the government will let people use the huts again [they have been off-limits during the pandemic] but you can use the outhouses and camp," says Eagle. The shelters also have barbecue pits and (when I was there) firewood. Free!

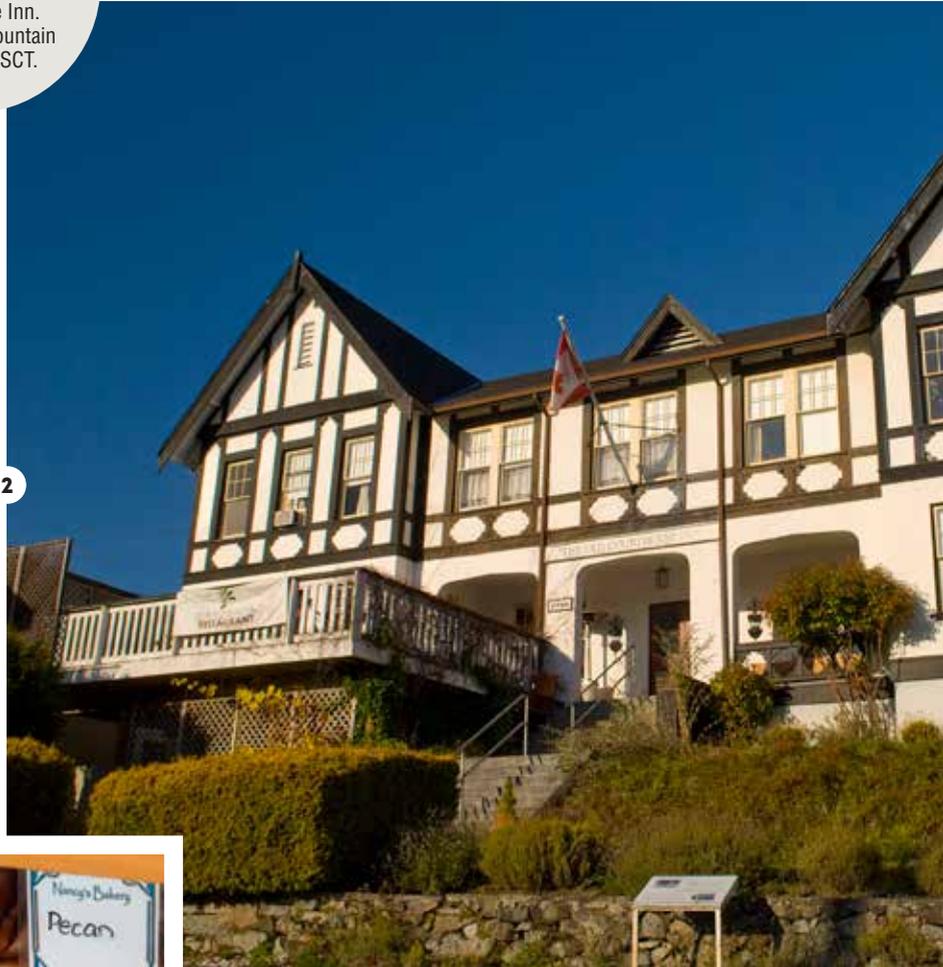
You'll come across many different environments on the SCT, from ocean shore to mountain ridge, lake and creek, as well as old-growth forest. "Because we are in a working forest, there is logging, but we're working hard to have buffers," Eagle explains. "It's important that we linked the trail to old-growth to increase awareness and support." With 500 wooden signs at road intersections and fluorescent orange markers every 100 metres or so, with more being installed, it's almost impossible to get lost. But you can arrange a private guided hike with Eagle through the Powell River visitor's bureau—his passion is contagious.

THAT ADAGE "PEOPLE make a Place" could be Pow Town's motto. They are an eclectic bunch. At Townsite Brewery you can see hipsters in their natural habitat; blue collar paper mill employees; white collars relocated from Vancouver; mountain bikers and hip retirees. Because dogs are welcome



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1. Darren Robinson taught the author how to take this photo. 2. The Old Courthouse Inn. 3. Tin Hat Mountain Hut on the SCT.



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on their garden patio, I stay for the flagship flight of beers: Zunga Golden Blonde, Suncoast Pale Ale, Tinhart IPA—my personal fave—and Perfect Storm Oatmeal Stout. A stone’s throw from the brewery is the quirky Old Courthouse Inn, the town’s former police station and jail. Proprietor Kelly Belanger greets us in the lobby wearing pajamas and slippers—it’s 5:30 p.m. We also meet Leo pushing a pram with a cocktail inside followed by an ancient dachshund. Above his door and residence for more than a year, is a plaque titled “Leo’s Lair.” As Kelly escorts us to our room stuffed with mismatched carpets and drapes and vintage knick-knacks, the piano miraculously bangs out a melody and scares Roxy. The Courthouse Inn is so dog friendly that Roxy joins me on Edie Rae’s Café patio for breakfast the next morning—I order an extra side of bacon. From every window looms the huge paper mill with its iron mashup of chimneys and chutes. In 1912 about 2,500 people worked here; in December 2021 the company announced it will close “indefinitely” after more than a century in business.

Chances are, the 400 or so workers who lost their jobs frequent the Royal Canadian Legion. We pop in this prime piece of real estate just in time for the meat draw. There has been no bingo since the pandemic, but the room is rocking. Next up is the 50-50 draw that produces heart palpitations as we sip our \$5 caesars—they are perfect.

This trip I see another side of Powell River because my friend Denys recently moved to the Cranberry neighbourhood that I didn’t know existed. Behind its steamy windows Magpie’s Diner is bustling with Cranberry locals scarfing down eggs benny and stacks of waffles piled high with local berries. Along with funky Cranberry, other areas that make up Powell River include swanky Westview, historic Townsite, the “gardener’s paradise” of Wildwood and just north is the Tla’amin First Nation (formerly known as the Sliammon First Nation).

Cranberry was once considered by locals as the wrong side of the tracks but it’s becoming gentrified and ▶



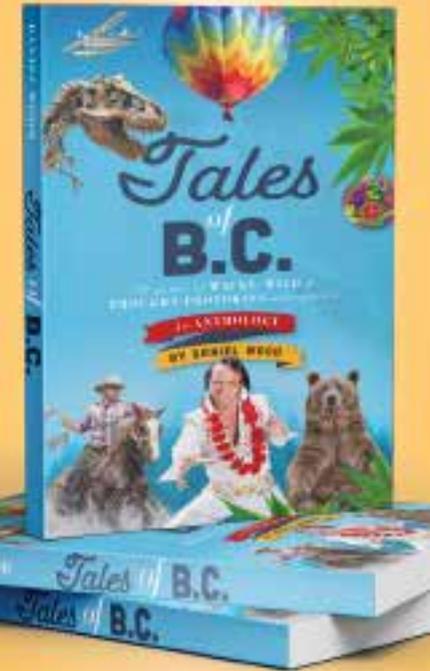
4. Nancy’s Bakery, famous for its cinnamon buns.
5. Powell River township. 6. Townsite Brewing Inc.



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A beautiful evening view of the Lund Small Craft Harbour and the Boardwalk Restaurant.

catching up to Westview. We pile into the car and cruise “Management Row” on Marine Avenue where the paper mill’s upper echelon resided and ogle craftsman post and beam homes with chimneys and wrap-around porches.

It’s time to stretch our legs and take Roxy for a hike. We drive through Sliammon and its wide stretches of sandy beaches to Lund. I had gleaned from the Powell River Historical Museum that this coastal tract has been home to the Tla’amin Nation for countless generations. Their village of Teeskwat was once at the mouth of the Powell River, before the waterway in 1910 was controversially dammed to serve the paper mill, forcing the Tla’amin to move north to the village of Sliammon.

By the time we get to Lund (just a few minutes) I need retail therapy and remember the Pollen Sweater Company next to Nancy’s Bakery, famous for her cinnamon buns. Alas, we continue driving with sticky fingers and no sweater this time—the store is closed. At the risk of sounding like an advertisement, these itch-free sweaters can be machine-washed

and if it ever wears out, you can compost it.

Onward to Hurtado Point, we park at hydro pole 349 and the park entrance is at pole 350; the sign is easy to miss. Rated as a moderate hike, the forest trail is shaded with shore pines and arbutus trees sprouting from rocky outcrops and moss carpets. After about 45 minutes we hear sea lions barking below and a spectacular view of Savary Island and other islands in the northern Salish Sea at the trail’s end.

From my friend’s home we stroll to Mowat Bay Park on Powell Lake. Right away I notice that, apart from one other man and his dog (we strike up a conversation and turns out they have mutual friends, just like in any small town) we are the only people on this sandy beach. Denys tells me a few hundred people were camped out here during the heat dome. It has freshwater swimming, washrooms, boat launch and playground—what better place to relax?

Around the corner from Mowat Bay Park is the Shinglemill Pub, overlooking the marina. We order more caesars. These bevies are meals unto

themselves but I have room for really good fish ‘n chips. It’s better to go grocery shopping on a full stomach, but that didn’t have any effect at the Chopping Block, an old-school butcher shop and so much more. We stock up with their homemade sausages, bacon and honey from Myrtle Point Heritage Farm’s free-roaming Berkshire pigs and honeybees; Savary Island granola and a tub of fresh pea sprouts. Later in the year the counters are filled with local mushrooms and produce from local farmers. That night over dinner, I daydream about a future life here. It’s tempting. 🍷

IF YOU GO

SLEEP

If you’re hiking the SCT don’t worry about critters sniffing around your tent—all you need is a sleeping bag and provisions, and the huts are free of charge—be sure to check if they are still off limits due to Covid-19. There are also good campsites around Powell River and in nearby Lund. Or rent a float cabin to experience off-the-grid life on Powell Lake. In Powell River, a room at Beyond Bliss is, well, blissful. And how convenient, the spa is downstairs. The Old Courthouse Inn is dog-friendly.

GETTING THERE

You can get to Powell River from Vancouver in less than five hours—around the same as driving to the Okanagan but better because you can sit back and marvel at the scenery. The ferry from Vancouver leaves Horseshoe Bay terminal, then a 40-minute sailing to Langdale on the Sunshine Coast.

Drive about 1.5 hours to Earl’s Cove and the second ferry crossing to Salter Bay. Drive 30 minutes to Powell River. BC Ferries (604-886-2242; bcferries.com). Or fly 35 minutes from South Terminal of Vancouver International Airport (YVR) to Powell River.

From Vancouver Island, Powell River is a 90-minute car ferry from Little River in Comox.

For more information, visit Sunshine Coast Tourism at sunshinecoastcanada.com.