

## **West Coast's 'other town' on the rise**

**Nanaimo News Bulletin**. Nanaimo, B.C.: Feb 24, 2007. pg. 22

*(Copyright (c) 2007 Black Press Group Ltd.)*

Three days of low cloud and thick fog seemed like adequate mental preparation for a trip to Ucluelet.

The grey shroud hung over the east coast of Vancouver Island, dampening our spirits as we motored along Highway 4 towards the West Coast.

"Maybe it'll break once we get over the mountains," I offered hopefully.

My travelling partner gave me a less-than-optimistic look. She knows full well Ucluelet and Long Beach can be even worse in the weather department in late January.

But just before Kennedy Lake, the first hint of blue sky appeared above the rugged, snow-capped peaks. And as we proceeded further west, the clouds gave way to open blue sky.

Ucluelet is a different place than I remember some 15 years ago. Today, the mountains have "greened-up" nicely and Ucluelet has diversified its economy.

There are still loggers, commercial fishing boats and processing plants, but Ucluelet is now much more. Thanks to a progressive municipal government, which knows the importance of a sound infrastructure, the little town is attracting big-money resorts and new, well-planned residential developments.

We took a quick tour around town and from there it was time to check into our B&B.

Host Robert Pankurst welcomed us out front of his lovely two- storey home and showed us to our room which looks out on Spring Cove. The B&B has three self-contained, ocean-front rooms and he hopes to build two more cabins in the next few years.

On Saturday after breakfast, Pankurst suggested we hike the Wild Pacific Trail. It proved to be an ideal jaunt to get the body going. It's a beautiful 2.7 km looped trail with stunning views of the open Pacific and rocky shores which are pummeled by the waves and swells.

The people of Ucluelet have done a remarkable job ensuring the natural values of the trail - which also goes through rain forest.

The day before we got a closer look at the ocean during a sunset trip to the Broken Islands aboard Subtidal Adventures.

The gray whales have yet to arrive for the Pacific Rim Whale Festival (March 17-25) but we were barely out of the harbour when we saw a seal, blue heron and bald eagle.

Even without the wildlife, the scenery is gorgeous throughout the Broken Islands, and we scouted out areas for a future kayaking/ camping trip. The day came to a glorious end as the sun "melted" into the great Pacific, and we cruised back for dinner at the Driftwood Patio Restaurant.

The Driftwood is contrasted with the Boat Basin Restaurant, located across the harbour at Tauca Lea Resort & Spa. On Saturday, we were given a tour of the six-year-old resort by general manager Volker Grady who said one of the key reasons their investors chose Ucluelet over Tofino was because the community had committed to improving its infrastructure and had a good plan in place for long- range growth.

He also pointed out that more big developments are coming in the next few years, including the Wyndansea Oceanfront Golf Resort, with the course designed by legendary pro Jack Nicklaus.

"There are certain projects I want to do, and this is one of them. This is a piece of property that is absolutely gorgeous, you couldn't find a better looking site anywhere in North America. To have the opportunity to do a golf course on this land, to work with this environment, to work with nature, the ocean, the trees, the rocks - it's an opportunity that you just can't pass up," said Nicklaus on his website.

After a day of hiking and exploring, I opted for the "hungry- man" Alberta beef main course and wasn't disappointed. It was perfectly cooked but I couldn't help but envy my better half's choice of grilled tuna. She raved for the rest of the night about the tuna and the "to die for" reduction sauce.

After one more night of comfy and quiet rest at the Ebb Tide - where you can just hear the din of the open ocean - we spent the morning watching the surfers near Incinerator Rock on Long Beach. Who knew there could so many surfers in January, but the waves and weather were perfect on this Sunday.

Alas, it was time to head back to the east coast of the Island. We ran smack into the fog at Kennedy Lake and Port Alberni was still glum. However, the vivid memories of our Ucluelet trip kept our spirits bright in spite of the grey day ahead.