Welcome to the Bella Coola Valley: In the Heart of British Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest

The Bella Coola valley is a place of rare beauty. Encircled by snow covered mountains, defined by a world-class salmon river that’s fed by the purest of waters, the valley is one of the gemstones of British Columbia’s Central Coast.

Located in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest and bordered by Tweedsmuir Park to the east, the valley offers an exceptional combination of wild forest, sheer-sided granite mountains and the exquisite Bella Coola river that flows into the Central Coast’s maze of fjords and inlets. Steeped in over 10,000 years of Nuxalk culture and tradition, the valley combines these breath-taking elements into an unforgettable, life-enriching experience that we welcome visitors to experience and share with us.

Central Coast Regional District

Hello, my friend

My name is Sixilaaxayc. My smayusta (Creation story) tells of the abundance that came at the time of Creation when the land tilted toward Chief Sixilaaxayc and Q’umk’uts on the bank of the river near where I live now.

One hundred years ago, several long houses stood at that place. Long before that, at the time of Creation, the tilting land brought much abundance to the Valley of Nuxalk, which means in my language “becoming one.” I welcome you to our Valley, where all you see is sacred.

I hope you enjoy the scenery, the rich history, and the abundance. Please enjoy your stay.

Sixilaaxayc (Noel Pootlass), Nuxalk Nation Head Hereditary Chief and Artist

ODEGAARD FALLS
Few places in the world combine authentic wilderness with comfort, and remoteness with accessibility the way the Bella Coola Valley does.

The glacier-carved valley of the Bella Coola River winds its way through the mountains to the sea at the head of one of British Columbia’s longest inlets about 450 km (270 mi) northwest of Vancouver.

**BY LAND: THE HWY 20 ADVENTURE**

All who approach the Bella Coola Valley via Highway 20 for the first time experience the driving adventure of a lifetime.

From its headwaters high on British Columbia’s central plateau, the river scours its way down through the Coast Mountains to saltwater at its mouth, providing a corridor for overland access from Williams Lake via Highway 20. This highway—paved to Anahim Lake (319km/192 mi)—is in itself an unparalleled adventure through the semi-arid forests and ranchlands of the Chilcotin Plateau, with the white gleaming peaks of the Coast Mountains drawing the visitor westward into the Chilcotin Ark, sanctuary to a host of wildlife species thriving in undisturbed wilderness. And further still, beyond the snow-capped horizon, the Great Bear Rainforest on British Columbia’s Central Coast.

At Anahim Lake, the pavement yields to an all-season gravel road—with a maximum speed of 80 km/h (50 mph). Where the telephone and electric power lines end a short distance later, the true wilderness begins. Here in this pristine region, the chance of spotting moose, wolves, black bears, and grizzlies becomes a distinct possibility, and the ancient practices of hunting, trapping, and fishing remain a vital part of the local culture.

At the eastern boundary of Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, a glance to the north detects the mountain pass where Alexander Mackenzie, one of North America’s first great adventurers, entered the history books in 1793 with his overland journey across North America to the waters of the Pacific at the mouth of the Bella Coola River. Here the imagination can conjure up parties of First Nations peoples throughout the millennia trekking up from the coast over the “Grease Trail” bearing their precious trading commodity of fish oil.

At the subalpine Heckman Pass, the moist influence of the Pacific is evident as Highway 20 begins its spectacular descent toward the sea.

Here the modern adventurer can gaze far below at the thin ribbon of road ahead. The “highway” winds down the mountainside to the valley floor and meanders seaward toward the heart of the Great Bear Rain Forest sweeping beyond the horizon left and right.

From the Pass, today’s adventurer descends the “Freedom Road”, dubbed such because its construction through the pass in 1953 ended the isolation of the Bella Coola Valley. “The Hill” is no longer the hair-raising spectacle that once discouraged faint hearted travelers with its 18% grades and hair-pin switchbacks. Today, tractor trailer rigs, supplying the valley merchants, travel the grades and curves regularly, and the fearsome reputation of “The Hill” far outstrips its reality.

Suddenly—pavement again. At the posted speeds, you have covered the 62 km (37 mi) of gravel road in about an hour. The remaining 80 km (50 mi) to the saltwater at
the end of Highway 20 winds with the river through forests of Douglas-Fir, Western Red Cedar, Western Hemlock and Sitka Spruce, past settlements and farmlands, down the glacier-carved valley with snow-capped peaks and granite ramparts lining the way.

Of course, as with all highways, caution is in order on Highway 20. Abide by the posted speeds, gear down—to first, not second gear—for the steeper sections of “The Hill”, and DON’T ride your brakes!!! In winter, spring, and fall (as with any mountain highway in Western Canada) it is wise to check the road conditions before heading out. (www.Drivebc.ca)

BY SEA: A COASTAL WONDERLAND

More serene, but likewise spectacular, is the approach to Bella Coola by sea.

Every summer, between Port Hardy, on northern Vancouver Island, and various points on the mid-coast, BC Ferries vessels cross the open waters of Queen Charlotte Sound into the islands and fjords of the Great Bear Rainforest.

One of the world’s largest remaining tracts of unspoiled temperate rain forest, this lush, protected ecosystem is a virtually untouched wilderness. At two million hectares (27,000 square miles), it encompasses an area nearly as large as Scotland!

Leaving the outer coast islands, the adventure continues through narrow glacial fjords that enter North Bentinck Arm to the mouth of the Bella Coola River—some 100 km (60 mi) inland. For the meditative traveler leaning on the rail, this mountainous coastline of stunning granite cliffs and tumbling waterfalls, misty green dark forests, and deep glacier-fed inlet waters dredges up images of tall ships of European explorers or the painted paddles of First Nations peoples in their dugout cedar canoes flashing in the sun since the dawn of time. Ferry reservations are strongly recommended.

GREAT BEAR CIRCLE ROUTE

Experience a Circle Tour by traveling clockwise from Vancouver to Vancouver Island, north to Port Hardy, ferrying to Bella Coola, and driving out across the Chilcotin Plateau, returning south through Whistler and back to Vancouver.

This Circle Tour takes the traveler through some 11 of the 14 commonly Identified eco-zones on Planet Earth. This four-to-five-day road trip is rivaled by few other such journeys.

Of course the reverse (counter-clockwise) tour is equally varied and spectacular.

BY AIR: A BIRDS EYE EXPERIENCE

By scheduled daily air service from Vancouver, in little more than an hour you can descend into the Valley after an awe-inspiring bird’s eye adventure.

Your flight soars high over emerald alpine tarns surrounded by meadows, where waterfalls gush amid glacial scree, and where volcanic cones and sawtooth pinnacles cradle rivers of ice, unseen by human eye except by air, winging above and around the highest mountains in British Columbia.

www.tweedsmuirtravel.com
www.pacificcoastal.com

GETTING AROUND IN THE VALLEY

If you don’t have your own vehicle on your BC adventure, rentals are available. Inquire at accommodations at the airport or visit www.bellacoolavehiclerentals.com.

Trips on the Community Bus can be pre-booked at least 24 hours in advance—or you can simply flag down the driver from the roadside. Fare for any distance is a flat rate. Dial-a-ride at (250) 799-0079. For more information, phone during business hours or visit www.bctransit.com.
Where the west is still plenty wild.

Discover the Great Bear Rainforest.

Sail through pristine glacial fjords with BC Ferries between Port Hardy and Bella Coola into the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest. Marvel at majestic grizzlies as they fish in the Atnarko and Bella Coola Rivers. Or hike to one of many alpine lakes to discover rugged landscapes and spectacular lookouts. Our travel experts can help you plan your perfect getaway, including hotel, ferry and activities.
Dive into and explore untouched coastal wilderness, small town culture, and Hardy traditions. On the northern tip of Vancouver Island is where you will find Port Hardy, a friendly town that sits at the very edge of the coastal wilderness. “Live the Adventure” is Port Hardy’s motto, and many who explore this remote part of the world choose to spend at least a few fascinating days living their adventure here. Located within the traditional territory of the Kwakiutl First Nation and home to two neighbouring First Nations bands, the Quatsino and Gwa’sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, Port Hardy and the surrounding area is rich in tradition and deep-rooted in culture. Totems and big houses stand tall and weathered throughout Port Hardy and the neighbouring community of Fort Rupert, telling of the indigenous history that began over 8,000 years ago.

Whether you come to hike our rugged and amazing trails, paddle along the rocky shores of neighbouring islands and inlets or catch the salmon of a lifetime—exploring Port Hardy is truly remarkable.

Plan your adventure — www.visitporthardy.com

NORTHERN SEA WOLF

BC Ferries’ Northern Sea Wolf provides direct summer sailings between Port Hardy and Bella Coola from early June through September. The vessel was named in honour of a First Nations legend in which the Sea Wolf is a manifestation of the Orca and symbolizes family, loyalty and the protection of those travelling their waters.

BC Ferries, in partnership with the First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC), commissioned two Indigenous artists to design artwork to adorn the Northern Sea Wolf: Richard Hunt of the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation in T’sakis (Fort Rupert, B.C.) and Danika Naccarella of the Nuxalk Nation in Bella Coola, B.C.
Advancing cooperative values by putting people before profits.

Proudly serving the Bella Coola Valley, Chilcotin and Cariboo regions.

Bella Coola Valley
621 Cliff Street
(250) 799-5328
M - T 9:30 to 5:00
Friday 9:30 to 6:00

Williams Lake
139 Third Ave North
(250) 392-4135
M - T 9:30 to 5:00
Friday 9:30 to 6:00
Saturday 9:30 to 3:00

100 Mile House
2-95 B Cariboo Hwy
(250) 395-4094
M - T 9:30 to 5:00
Friday 9:30 to 6:00

Williams Lake & District Credit Union
For countless generations, the people living in the Bella Coola Valley have fished its rivers and hewn its trees amid the magnificent mountains and verdant forests of the northwest coast of this continent.

One origin theory suggests the first of them crossed from Asia on an ice (or land) bridge far to the north and migrated south along the coast before occupying the Bella Coola Valley as the ice receded after the last Ice Age some 10,000 years ago. Another has them arriving from the South Pacific via rafts borne on ocean currents. Still another has them arriving at the time of Creation, on the eyelashes of the sun, in animal form, landing on various mountain tops where they took on human form.

Whatever the case, they are related by language to peoples of the Lower Fraser and Thompson Rivers and not to other coastal First Nations. Their society, now called Nuxalk (pronounced “Noo-halk”), was rich in material and cultural wealth and had strong links covering a vast territory by way of dugout canoe and a network of trails—a major one being the “Grease Trail”, so-called for a prized trade commodity: the grease of the eulachon (a small smelt-like fish) that swarmed the coastal rivers each spring.

The first encounter between the Nuxalk people and Europeans was in 1793 when sea Captain George Vancouver sailed up the fjord to the mouth of the Bella Coola River. Then, seven weeks later Scottish explorer Alexander Mackenzie and his six voyageur companions, with the assistance of aboriginal guides, completed the first recorded land crossing of North America at the same point after following the historic Grease Trail, descending from the Rainbow Mountains to the Valley floor. From there, Mackenzie was guided downriver to Pacific waters and out the fjords toward the open ocean, terminating the trek at “Mackenzie’s Rock” on the Dean Channel.

In 1867, the Hudson’s Bay Company established a trading post near the mouth of the River. At the time, the Valley served as a major transportation route from tidewater inland to the Cariboo gold fields, and many lingered on, prospecting, trapping, and trading. Only 16 non-aboriginal people resided in the Valley in 1894 when some 200 Norwegian-speaking homesteaders settled “up Valley” in the area now known as Hagensborg and downriver in “Lower Bella Coola.” They were soon followed by a colony of Seventh Day Adventists who settled primarily in the Firvale area.

The settlers tapped the rich resources of the area, as farmers, commercial fishermen, and loggers. The abundant resources and developing economy soon attracted the fishing and logging corporations which operated on the Central Coast for many decades throughout the 20th Century.

Meanwhile, smallpox had arrived in 1862, and the Nuxalk population, lacking natural immunity, was reduced from thousands to 200, their 45 villages to one at the mouth of the Bella Coola River. Then the Canadian government banned the potlatch (the Nuxalk governance mechanism) and dispersed their families with the Residential School policy—eroding the Nuxalk cultural roots. Today, with the potlatch ban and the Residential School policy revoked, signs of Nuxalk cultural revival attest to the resilience of this People.

As the region’s resource industries declined at the turn of the millennium, the region’s spectacular natural beauty and wild, pristine wilderness have given rise to an increasing interest in tourism. The stunning landscapes of the Bella Coola Valley and surrounding area had already been formally recognized with the creation of Tweedsmuir Provincial Park (1938) to the east. More recently (2006), the protection of the surrounding Great Bear Rainforest—accessible by road only along Highway 20—is prompting development of this sustainable industry in the region.

Locally-built road access via Highway 20, up (and down) Bella Coola’s infamous “Hill”, opened in 1953 as Canada’s third route to the Pacific, celebrating the pioneer spirit of those who live here and the adventurer in all who visit.
VENTURING WEST OUT THE CHANNEL

Enjoy a maritime experience by taking a marine day tour cruising out from the Bella Coola Harbour over the glacial waters of North Bentinck Arm and into a vast network of deep fjords—South Bentinck, Labouchere, Burke, Dean—past timbered rocky shores and snow-capped peaks where the solitude is broken over and over again by the many scenic highlights that loom into view as you approach.

Keep your camera at the ready!

GLIMPING THE PAST

Your marine adventure begins at the Government Wharf where you might cruise across the Inlet to tour the picturesque Tallheo cannery, once a Customs house. Built in the early 1900’s it became a hive of activity in the heyday of fish canning before the long-haul packer boat.

Further out the inlet, marvel at the ancient fish traps, petroglyphs and pictographs, indelible signs left on the rocky shores and cliffs by First Nations people who, according to archaeologists, paddled along these fjords more than 10,000 years ago—5,000 years before the Great Pyramid was built in Egypt.

TAKING A HOT DIP

Relax and soak away your cares in the hot soothing waters of a seaside wilderness hot spring. Natural hot springs, accessible only by air or water, are just a charter away from the Bella Coola Harbour. Or rent or bring your own sea kayaks (but be prepared for an overnighter). Perhaps sight some dolphins, seals or eagles on the way out. The hot springs are sacred places to the Nuxalk people who have enjoyed their healing powers for millennia, so respect them as you might a Gothic cathedral.

SEEING BIG – FEELING SMALL

If you’ve never been humbled by the awe that comes with standing under the dark, swooping branches of a botanical wonder, here’s your chance: The Big Cedar Tree, just a short hike up from the beach at Larso Bay on South Bentinck Arm, measures more than 5 metres (18 feet) in diameter. That’s a whopping 18 metres around (more than 56.5 feet)! This ancient giant was a seedling during the late Roman Empire 1,500 years ago.

VIEWING THE WILDLIFE

As you cruise along the often misty tidal beaches and estuaries of creeks and...
rivers through the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest, keep your eyes peeled. In the spring, bears emerge from their alpine dens after the long fast of hibernation and offer prime wildlife viewing. Grizzly bears and black bears, and even the rare white kermode (or “spirit bear” in First Nations lore) descend to the lowlands and beaches for the first tender grass and shoots growing close to the tide line. In late summer and fall, the bears gorge themselves on the salmon returning to spawn in the coastal creeks and rivers.

In the early morning, at first light, wolves often appear along the creek mouths and estuaries. Early in the evening, from your offshore anchorage, you may hear their eerie howls drifting out over the calm waters.

The Great Bear Rainforest teems with wildlife including bald eagles, seals, sea lions, and otters. At times, dolphins, humpback whales and killer whales (orcas or “blackfish” in First Nations parlance) break the water with their breaching—a sight to behold!

HEADS UP!
While Bella Coola’s remote wilderness setting makes it an attractive tourist destination, it also results in challenges to meet the hopes and wishes of our visitors. During the busy summer season—and certainly during the height of the bear-viewing season—visitors are wise to reserve accommodations in advance. Likewise for activities such as marine tours.

The Great Bear Rainforest is connected, but…

Despite its remoteness, the Valley is “connected” via satellite, providing television and High-Speed Internet. Cell phone service can be spotty, but you can receive service on the Bella Coola townsite, at the Harbour, the Airport, and in Hagensborg. Most businesses have debit/credit card connections, but many home businesses take cheques or cash only. Cash is available at three ATMs: Thunderbird Grocery on the Townsite, Hagensborg Mercantile, and the Williams Lake and District Credit Union, where an outdoor ATM is accessible 24/7.

Pay telephones are few—with none between Hagensborg and Anahim Lake—130 km (85 mi) east on Highway 20. Payphones accessible 24/7 are located at the Government Wharf, at the Bella Coola General Hospital on the Townsite, at the airport, in Hagensborg and at the Bailey Bridge Campsite.
Sailing Adventures in the Great Bear Rainforest

Daily Sailing Trips (Groups up to 8 people)
Also: Custom Multi-Day Trips anywhere on the Central Coast

Enjoy Spectacular Wildlife Viewing from the comfort of our beautiful Pilothouse Yacht.

* Marine Wildlife * Grizzly & Black Bears * Crabbing
* Hot Springs * Bird watching * Fresh Seafood Lunch
* Learn to Sail

National Geographic Photographers & Explorers
Helle Olsen & Uri Golman:
“Absolutely Incredible! The Highlight of our Trip!”

Great Bear Sailing Adventures
www.greatbearsailingadventures.com   Email: greatbearsailingadventures@gmail.com   CEL: 1-250-957-8645
CONNECTING ADVENTURES AT MACKENZIE’S ROCK

Alexander Mackenzie from Canada by land 22nd July 1793: So reads the vermilion inscription daubed on a rock standing on the shore at the mouth of Elcho Harbour in the Dean Channel. You connect your Central Coast adventure with Mackenzie’s at this rock, the western terminus of his daunting adventure—the first recorded trek across the North American continent some 12 years before the more famous but much longer a journey by American explorers Lewis and Clark.

CONNECTING AGAIN AT CASCADE INLET

You make another historic connection with the 1793 tall-ship voyage of Captain George Vancouver, who named this fjord for the myriad waterfalls cascading down the glacier-carved granite walls. Be sure to bring your binoculars to get a close-up look at families of the majestic white mountain goats clinging to the rocky crevices and narrow ledges of the sheer cliffs plunging into the inlet.

HOOING THE BIG ONES!

The Bella Coola Harbour is a great departure point for saltwater anglers heading out to enjoy the bounty of marine life while taking in the pristine scenery of the Central Coast. Cruise along the cliffs rising skyward from glacial fjords as deep as 600 metres (2,000 feet). Cast your eyes up to the rugged snow-capped peaks as you angle for Chinook and Coho salmon.

Drop your line to the bottom for huge halibut, or bring up lunker ling cod and red snappers from the deep rocky shelves. Set your traps for jumbo white spot prawns from the deep and for Dungeness crabs near the mouths of the creeks.

MARINE CHARTERS AND TOURS

At the Government Wharf in the Bella Coola Harbour, 2 km (1.2 mi) west of the Bella Coola Townsite, ocean-going charter boats with seasoned skippers and guides are available for a day tour or an extended nautical journey to the area of your choice.

Tour highlights can include: the Bella Coola estuary, historic cannery sites, wildlife/marine life viewing, hot springs, the Big Cedar Tree or Mackenzie’s Rock.

The Bella Coola Harbour Authority provides mooring floats, fuel, boat launching, parking, washrooms and laundry facilities for boaters.

LICENCES AND REGULATIONS

Saltwater and freshwater fishing licenses can be obtained—along with government regulations—in Bella Coola Valley establishments selling fishing tackle.

Information on saltwater fishing specifically is available at the office of Fisheries and Oceans Canada on Highway 20 at the Bella Coola Townsite.

Phone (250) 799-5345.
OUR COMMUNITIES

The Bella Coola Valley is 80 km (50 mi) long with a population of approximately 2000. From west to east the Valley consists of several small communities:

The Bella Coola Townsite is located at the head of North Bentinck Arm on the Bella Coola River. The commercial centre of the Valley, the townsite offers accommodation, restaurants, groceries, fuel, auto repairs, banking and other retail services. The region’s Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachment is located here along with a library, museum, hospital, clinic, pharmacy, and post office. Marine services are nearby at the Government Wharf. Part of the Townsite is a Nuxalk village.

Drop by Bella Coola Valley Tourism’s Visitor Information Booth during the summer months for detailed information on accommodation, attractions, local events, and hiking and wildlife bulletins. Phone (250) 799-5202 or visit www.bellacoola.ca.

Four-Mile Subdivision (Snxllh or “Sunny Village”), four miles from the Government Wharf, is a second Nuxalk residential area and the home of the Nuxalk Administration and a unique school. At this school—“Acwsalcta” (in the Nuxalk language, ‘a place of learning’)—instruction in the Nuxalk language is keeping it and the culture alive by integrating them into the regular curriculum. The shorter totem pole outside the entry was carved by a teacher and students in 2002—the first totem pole erected in 38 years; the taller one, by a father-son pair of carvers, was raised in 2007 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of this special school. There are Nuxalk art galleries and other surprises to be discovered in this neighbourhood. (See p. 20.) Ask at the Nuxalk Administration office or visit nuxalknation.com.

Hagensborg, 16 km (10 mi) east “up Valley”, is the other commercial centre with groceries, gifts, accommodations, camping, fuel, auto repairs and post office. On Friday nights, the Royal Canadian Legion is open for pub service. In summer, the outdoor Centennial Swimming Pool next door is open for swimming as well as lessons and specialty classes. Phone (250) 982-2488.
Fuel: Available on the Townsite, at Four-Mile and in Hagensborg, but nowhere 24/7. Fuel is not available between Hagensborg and Anahim Lake.

Shopping: A number of businesses are open on Sunday. Some establishments close on Mondays and some may close for lunch breaks.

Sani-Stations: Located at Tweedsmuir Provincial Park Headquarters (near the foot of “The Hill”), and at several of the private campgrounds in the Valley.

Nearby is the picturesque and historic Augsburg Church, which celebrated 100 years in 2004.

Firvale, located midway up the valley, was first settled by Seventh Day Adventists in the early 20th Century. Only a few houses and farms of this once-thriving community remain, scattered along the scenic highway.

Stuie, a pocket-sized gem in the south end of Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, was the original locale of the well-known Stuie Lodge, constructed in 1931 and destroyed by fire in 1950. This is also traditional territory of First Nations peoples who for thousands of years have sustained themselves on the abundance provided by the Atnarko River and surrounding forest.

VALLEY ADVENTURES

From sightseeing to outdoor adventure, embark on a scenic Valley journey using Highway 20 as your guide. Explorers, day-trippers, anglers, and nature enthusiasts will find plenty beckoning to be discovered along the byways and trails, shorelines and river banks.

WEST BEYOND THE HARBOUR

The western end of Highway 20 is the Bella Coola Harbour and Government Wharf, but the gravel road continuing west from there for 2.5 km (1.6 mi) provides access to Clayton Falls. (See Trail Guide, p. 9.) A left turn at that point takes the adventurer 23 km (14 mi) into the alpine with spectacular views of the nearby fjords and meadow-lined lakes (See Trail Guide, p. 7, 8.)

THE BELLA COOLA HARBOUR

Back at the harbour, stroll around the Government Wharf among the commercial fishing boats and pleasure craft bobbing at their moorings. Across the channel from the Harbour, historic Tallheo Cannery, built in 1917 and operated by the Canadian Fish Co. until 1947, still stands as a reminder of a time when commercial fishing was a mainstay
of the coastal economy. This monument to progress, abandoned after efficient long-haul packer boats began transporting fish south for processing, is one of the last canneries left standing on Canada’s West Coast.

The harbour is the arrival and departure point for the ferry service of the Great Bear Circle Tour between Bella Coola & Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. Depending on schedules & the time of year, the Great Bear Circle Tour May be a direct daytime sailing or may include landings at Ocean Falls, Denny Island, and McLaughlin Bay (Bella Bella). Ferry passage can be booked at the BC Ferries agent on the Bella Coola townsite: Tweedsmuir Travel, 618 Cliff Street, (250) 799-5638. Reserve ahead of time to ensure a space on the ferry.

EAST FROM THE HARBOUR

Walk or cycle the popular cliff-side route between the harbour and the Bella Coola Townsite. Scan the estuary, locally known as the Tide-Flats, a rich eco-system and home to waterfowl, migrating birds, and bears. A number of old roads and trails weave in and out of the forest to the junction where river meets sea. Entry points vary. This is a tidal zone, so beware of incoming water to avoid getting wet or stranded.

Stop at the commemorative roadside rock where plaques honour Canada’s pioneers and Alexander Mackenzie’s trans-continental trek. Listen here for the rush of water cascading over the rainforest cliffs and step into the woods to find “Hidden Falls”.

THE BELLA COOLA TOWNSITE

- Enjoy the shops, restaurants, and accommodations.
- Visit the Museum and pick up the brochure for the self-guided historic walking tour which details the historical landmarks around the village including the location of the Hudson Bay manager’s home, the House of Numst’ with its totem pole entry, and the tiny cabin that served as Bella Coola’s first jail.
- Be sure to take in the eulachon welcome post on River Road and the totem poles across from the Co-Op and at Healthy Beginnings.
- Mail your postcards from the Bella Coola Post Office and ask for the unique Nuxalk-designed cancellation stamp.

FROM THE TOWNSITE TO HAGENSBORG (16 KM/10 MI)

- For a truly mystical experience, engage a Nuxalk guide and visit the ancient petroglyphs along Thorsen Creek (“Squmalh” to the Nuxalk). See p. 21.
- In summer, visit the Farmers’ Market on

Amazing selection of BC books (over 250 titles relating to the region). Outstanding native jewelry, masks, other carvings, and artwork; many unique souvenir items; sporting goods, topographic maps, marine charts, and licences; clothing, footwear, toys and giftware.

Phone: 250-799-5553
Fax: 250-799-5801
Email: BCSupply33@gmail.com
http://bellacoola.ca/portfolio/kopas-store

Open Monday - Saturday 8:30 am - 5:30 pm / Closed Sundays and Holidays
Sunday mornings at the Fall Fair Grounds.

• During July & August, be sure to stop by the very popular “Night Market” located across from the Co-Op at the Bella Coola townsite every Wednesday evening for musical entertainment & art, local produce & more.

• For a truly humbling experience, walk among the giant trees enclosing the trails in Snootli Creek Regional Park. (See Trail Guide, p. 8.)

• Take a short side trip into Walker Island Regional Park, a popular park with locals. Here are playing fields, picnic sites, barbecue pit, and a kiddies’ playground. Majestic old-growth cedars arch overhead, and the river is accessible. Here at the Rodeo Grounds you can catch cowboys and cowgirls in action each July long weekend.

• When heading up valley, relax at the roadside-pullover stop of interest. Here, travellers can get a sense of the valley with a locations map or enjoy a scenic picnic lunch. Free WIFI is provided by Central Coast Communications Society. Directly south of the pullout is a perfect example of a glacial “hanging valley”, meaning this spot was under ice 2,000 meters thick.

• **Snootli Creek Hatchery** – Take a guided tour of this federal salmon hatchery, hatching and rearing over ten million salmon fry each year for release into rivers up and down the Central Coast. Guided tours are provided depending on the number of staff available. Please call ahead for additional tour information and tours for large groups. Phone (250) 982-2214.

• From July to September, stop at the many bridges along the valley to wonder over the migrations of spawning salmon in the Valley creeks and rivers. Please park in a safe, respectful manner and beware of bears!

• At Nooklkonnic Creek just west of Hagensborg, pull off at the bridge for a spectacular view of glacier-shouldered Mt. Saugstad (named for the Norwegian pioneer leader, Reverend Christian Saugstad). Rising to 2,905 metres (9,532 feet), it is the highest Coast Mountain peak visible from the Valley floor.

**HAGENSBORG**

Cleared by hand from the old growth rainforest, the farms and fields of this settlement nurtured Norwegian-speaking colonists who settled the Valley between 1894 and 1910.

• Share the pioneer experience in a visit to the Norwegian Heritage House, or the historic Augsburg Church, once a place of worship for the Lutheran pioneers. This visit is not complete without a quiet walk through the Hagensborg Cemetery a short drive west down Highway 20 and south on
Sawmill Road (site of one of the Valley’s early sawmills.)

- At the east end of the terminal building at the Airport, check out the the BIG cedar tree 50 metres along a forest trail. Book a heli-hiking trip into the alpine or take it easy by booking a “flightseeing” tour of the area’s mountains, glaciers and fjords by helicopter.
- Cool off with a refreshing swim at the Centennial Pool in Hagensborg.
- Drop by the Valley Gallery featuring local art, operated by the Bella Coola Valley Arts Council.

FROM HAGENSBORG TO “THE HILL”

- From Highway 20 two km (1.2 mi.) east of Hagensborg, a left turn onto Saloompt Road leads to “The Bailey Bridge”, one of the only two bridges across the Bella Coola River. In “The Sunny Saloompt” (so called because much of the area escapes the winter mountain shadow that covers a lot of the Valley), take in the Saloompt Forest Trails. Here, old-growth cedars, spruce, hemlock, and Douglas-fir, seedlings during the Crusades, humble the human visitor. (See Trail Guide, p. 16.)
- While in the Saloompt (“Salmt” in Nuxalk, meaning “a good place to live”), venture on to Lost Lake (See Trail Guide p.17.)
- Further up the logging road to the left is the rifle range operated by the local Rod and Gun Club.
- Returning to Highway 20, 3.3 km (2 mi) east of the Saloompt turnoff, is the West Nusatsum Forest Road which gives access to the picturesque Odegaard Falls and to virtually unlimited alpine terrain. (See Trail Guide, p. 18-22.)
- Further east on Highway 20, just across the Bella Coola River bridge, check out the monumental Nuxalk memorial arch on the left and the totem pole a short distance further on the right raised in 2014 to honour the family on whose traditional territory it stands.
- Further east on Highway 20 near Firvale, watch for mountain goats that often descend from the cliffs at Assanany Creek and hang out along the roadway. Here, a short walk up the creek leads to the base of Assanany Creek Falls.

ENTERING TWEEDSMUIR PARK

- At the Park entrance, at Burnt Bridge Creek, explore the historic area where Alexander Mackenzie reached the Valley floor after his trek across the continent and the Coast Mountains. Here he was so hospitably hosted by a large Nuxalk village that he dubbed it “Friendly Village.” See Trail Guide, p.25 for information about this opportunity to experience walking in the footsteps of this great adventurer—and for a stunning view down the Valley!
- At McCall Flats, take the Talchako Forest Service Road. Notice Horsetail Falls plummeting down the west-facing cliff. Mountain goats may be seen on the bluffs. Relax or picnic on a sandy riverside beach. Hike or bike the trails and roads.
- At Fisheries Pool or Atnarko Campground, picnic, camp, swim, or just relax and watch the river flow past. Bear in mind that you are in grizzly bear habitat, especially in late summer and early fall during the big salmon runs. This is one of the most popular spots to fish in the entire Valley.
- At Stuie, turn off the pavement onto the old Highway 20 and drive through Douglas-Fir parkland to the “Smokehouse”, a lean-to shelter on the north side where First Nations people from the Chilcotin may be smoking fish netted in the river pool below—as they have done since time immemorial.
- At the Belarko Wildlife Viewing station, walk out on the platform during the late summer or early fall for a safe vantage point to view grizzly bears snagging fresh salmon and chowing down.
- Just beyond the Wildlife Viewing station and boat launch, notice the moss-roofed (privately owned) log cabin where Edward Norton filled in a postcard (post-marked “Bella Coola”) while on the lam in the final scene of the 2008 Hollywood blockbuster “The Incredible Hulk.”
• At Big Rock and Kettle Pond have a picnic after a short walk to see this unique geological feature. (See Trail Guide, p.26.)
• At Mosher Creek, stop and imagine the force of water that took out bridge access and splintered the giant trees standing as reminders of the one-day rainfall that isolated Bella Coola from the rest of the world in September, 2010.
• At the Atnarko Tote Road, mountain bike, hike or drive this historic trail, which leaves Highway 20 at the foot of “The Hill.” It was once part of the main route entering and leaving the valley. The 11 km (7 mi) of rough 4X4 road was also part of the old telegraph line and now ends at the trailhead for Hunlen Falls (among North America’s highest waterfalls). This road and part of the trail also leads to the former homestead of the legendary Ralph Edwards of Lonesome Lake, “The keeper of the swans.” The homestead burned to the ground in the Tweedsmuir Fire of 2004. Travelling the road and trail in daylight is recommended to minimize wildlife encounters. See page 3 of the Trail Guide for Bear and Cougar Awareness.

YOUR VALLEY TOUR ENDS

The pavement ends.
Highway 20, your trusty guide from the tidewater 80 km (50 mi) downriver to the west, veers sharply left and begins the ascent up Bella Coola’s infamous “Hill.” In short order, the stunning climb provides some of the steepest scenery anywhere and a sheer sense of accomplishment. A drive of only 25 minutes at the posted speed limit winds around 11 switchbacks with short grades up to 18%, topping out at 5,000 feet at Heckman Pass. Here a viewpoint provides a last look down through the Coast Mountains toward the Great Bear Rainforest where the Bella Coola River scours its deep course down to the sea.
Experience the awe and humility of true coexistence in some of the most spectacular wilderness found on Earth. Enjoy an exclusive, intimate stay and celebrate the reign of the grizzly bear as monarch over our Valley home. Our all-inclusive packages allow Great Bear Chalet to share our ecologically responsible home with you. Re-wild your Spirit; make unforgettable memories to empower your story; explore the nature of coexistence through consideration and thrive on this River of Bears - gateway to the Great Bear Rainforest.

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ECO-TOUR DRIFTS
The Bella Coola and Atnarko Rivers offer the opportunity to drift placidly downstream through the heart of a rich rainforest on the valley floor with snowcapped mountains cradling glaciers towering above.

Drifters might see a bald eagle diving for a salmon targeted from high above, or one on a river bar already tearing at its newly snagged feast. They might catch the thrilling experience of seeing a river otter floating idly along the log-strewn shore or a grizzly crashing through the current, launching itself at a salmon.

Three-hour or full-day tours are available with experienced and friendly guides that cater to both individuals and groups. Many tours offer snacks or bagged lunches for longer trips. During your trip, be sure to keep your guide busy with questions. They are eager to share stories and provide a better understanding of your rainforest surroundings.

OTHER ADVENTURES

Hiking, Mountaineering, and Rock Climbing
Major trails are described in the Trail Guide. For more extreme adventurers, the Bella Coola Valley has an abundance of granite for rock climbing, and there are many classic routes in the Coast Mountains for mountaineering and ski-mountaineering.

Cycling
With 80 km (50 mi) of mostly downhill pavement from “The Hill” to the Government Wharf, avid cyclists will not want to leave their wheels behind.

Mountain Biking, ATVing and Dirt Biking
Explore developed trails and logging roads from one end of the Valley to the other. Try out our newest bike loop trail at Schoolhouse Falls. See Trail Guide for details.

Motorcycling
Many kilometers of wilderness roads climb up the side valleys onto the mountain slopes, and Highway 20 is certainly a unique country cruise.

Geocaching
There are many geocaches in the Valley and along Highway 20. Go to www.geocaching.com for coordinates.
BOATING, CANOEING, KAYAKING, RAFTING

Bella Coola Valley rivers and waterways provide virtually endless opportunities, but adventurers must always be “bear aware” and mindful of the wilderness conditions. The estuary and somewhat sheltered fjords offer hundreds of kilometers of shoreline to explore, and the rivers provide hours and days of paddling and rowing opportunities. If you don’t have your own, check with the Visitor Information Booth for rental opportunities.

KITE BOARDING & SAILBOARDING

On a nice summer day, check out the inlet from Clayton Falls Creek just west of the Bella Coola Townsite.

HELI-SKIING

Unbelievable depths of stable powder with some of the greatest verticals in North America combine to create the perfect heli-skiing experience. Operations are based at the Airport just west of Hagensborg.

SNOWMOBILING

The East Branch Creek area near the top of “The Hill” in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park is renowned for its excellent snowmobile terrain and snow conditions. The upper Clayton Falls Creek area (accessible west of the Bella Coola Harbour) is also popular.

DOWNHILL SKIING, CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING & SNOWSHOEING

The local ski club operates a tow lift on weekends in the East Branch Creek area near the top of “The Hill.” In addition, there are more than 20 km (12 mi) of track set Nordic ski trails at East Branch.

Go to www.tweedsmuiriskiclub.com for information.
BEAR VIEWING

Watching a bear foraging is an unforgettable experience! Adventurers driving along Highway 20 into the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest any time from late spring to late fall may chance upon a sow and her cubs grazing on the long grasses along the roadside. However, the prime bear-viewing opportunities are in the late spring, and then again in late summer and fall when the salmon are running in the rivers. Large populations of both black bears and grizzlies inhabit the region. For best practices while bear viewing, see p. 4 in the Trail Guide.

TOURS

• Tours are offered by knowledgeable, experienced and accredited bear viewing guides. Among them are those who drift their guests in shallow-keel boats quietly down the Atnarko and Bella Coola Rivers, looking for bears and eagles feeding on spawning salmon.
EXPERIENCE WORLD-CLASS FISHING

The Bella Coola Valley is renowned the world over for its fresh-water fishing. Each year, all five Pacific salmon species return to the Bella Coola River to spawn after maturing at sea: Sockeye, Coho, Chum, Pink—and the prize of them all, the mighty Chinook salmon (variously called Spring, King or Tyee) which often exceed 25 pounds (11 kg) and have been known to weigh more than 50 pounds (22 kg)! Year after year, anglers also return to the river and its tributaries, often moving up the river with the runs to the Atnarko River, the Bella Coola River’s major accessible tributary.

Also highly popular with anglers is the pursuit of feisty Rainbow, Dolly Varden, and Cutthroat trout.

Steelhead, an ocean-going rainbow trout, also run in the Bella Coola River system, but fishing for them is prohibited and those caught accidentally must be carefully released.

As fishing is highly regulated and the penalties for violations severe, anglers are advised to consult the fresh-water fishing regulations available locally wherever fishing licenses are sold.

Anglers unfamiliar with the area may wish to engage a guide to take them on a guided river drift.

BEAR SAFETY FOR ANGLERS

Always remember you’re in bear country. Don’t make it easy for bears to find food, food containers, backpacks, garbage, fish, or fish waste. Bear can smell from miles away. As soon as a fish catch is caught, immediately kill it and bleed it in the water. Store on ice in a bear-proof container. If using a stringer, keep it in the water near you. Never leave fish exposed on the bank. Clean fish at a designated fish cleaning station. Never leave fish waste in garbage cans; use bear resistant containers or dumpsters. If you’re camping, keep a clean camp. Always keep food and food containers secure in your vehicle and never in your tent.
Where Wilderness Meets Luxury

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› Private & small group Grizzly Bear Viewing

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www.tweedsmuirparklodge.com
The Bella Coola Valley has been inhabited by Nuxalk ancestors for more than 8000 years as attested by the petroglyphs at Thorsen Creek Conservancy dating back between 6000 and 8000 years. Bella Coola Valley has a very rich history whether it is culturally, ecologically or geologically.

The geology and ecology of the Bella Coola valley is complex and is the crossroads of many transitioning ecosystems. It is the ecological break between north and south in British Columbia and uniquely changes from marine to dry interior plateau ecosystems in less than 100 kilometers, from sea level to over 1500 metres, east to west (most mountain ranges in North and South America run north to south). The quick changes in ecosystems provide a wide variety of overlapping habitats for a great many species making the area rich, unique and diversified.

Driving east along highway 20 and looking north one can see very old and brittle granites identifiable by talus slopes. Further east, these hot and dry northern slopes are the home of Interior Douglas Fir (which do not like wet feet), stands of indigenous pine and cedar at the bottom of the slope. It is an unique and rare ecosystem, particularly on the east side of the Coast Mountains and this far north. The Bella Coola and the Dean valleys are as far north as Douglas fir grows in the Province of BC.

Looking south and east from Bella Coola, one can see a great difference in both the vegetation and glaciated mountains of the North Pacific Ranges. These mountains are still rising after glaciation. Canadian geological society research of the area indicates the possibility of the Atnarko River being the actual edge of the continent, which the North Pacific Ranges are pushing into (and rising). This geological activity makes for a substantial change in ecosystems throughout the Bella Coola Valley.

Most of the valley roads follow rivers and creeks. This is the Riparian Zone, or the interface between water and land. All five species of Pacific salmon return to the rivers and creeks of the valley to spawn at various times through the summer, moving high into the Upper Atnarko and Talchako rivers, after which they die. Salmon are a keystone species, feeding a staggering number of other plants and animals while they are alive and after they have spawned. Bears, eagles and many other species drag fish carcasses up into the Riparian area where the decomposing fish remains fertilize the forest and support the richness and abundance of the valley ecosystems.

Steelhead, rainbow, cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden char also inhabit the rivers and creeks; making this an angler’s delight! River otters and mink forage here as well and you may see the iconic Canadian beaver.

Some other wildlife you may encounter while exploring the valley include ungulates, such as goat, mule and white tail deer, as they move from valley bottom to about 1200 meters seasonally, while moose browse the valley bottom and mountain goat forage at higher elevations on the cliffs and rocky ledges. Large predators such as wolves and mountain lions follow the ungulates while omnivores such as Grizzly and Black bear forage from valley bottom to alpine. A great many song birds, birds of prey, waterfowl such as Trumpeter Swans, and more utilize the valley’s various ecosystems in their migrations and some are year-round residents.

Smaller wildlife such rabbits, squirrels and chipmunks, and rodents like moles, voles and mice inhabit the forest and riparian and wetland areas across the elevations while fox, and fisher, martin hunt them through the seasons. At dusk, while looking at openings in the forest canopy you can see bats flying about and foraging on bugs. Amphibians such as frogs, toads, newts and salamanders inhabit the forest, wetlands and streams. Along the areas like the Tote road you may see reptiles such as the rare northern alligator lizard and various coloured garter snakes or possibly the elusive and very rare rubber boa.
ARTS & CRAFTS

Besides at special events such as the annual Arts and Crafts Fair, the works of artisans can be found in retail stores and galleries and small home workshops and display rooms up and down the Valley.

Unique works may include a traditional quilt or an “art” quilt (to be displayed on the wall), hand-crafted wooden furnishings, painted canvases, or fused glass jewelry.

NUXALK ART

While Nuxalk art, largely carved in cedar or silver, is available in retail outlets, it is also hidden away in the home-based workshops of the artists. By asking around, you can create a chance to see a carver chiseling a cedar block into a mask or memorial pole or a group of Nuxalk women weaving cedar bark into roses or lidded containers.

Start at the Nuxalk administration office at Four-Mile. By engaging a Nuxalk guide, you can ensure you will see more than meets the eye and add significantly to this cross-cultural experience.

At Four-Mile, don’t miss a visit to Acwalctla School, a work of art in itself. You can’t miss the two magnificent totem poles outside, and the school lobby serves as a showcase of Nuxalk art and artifacts. Up Valley, don’t miss the carved memorial monument 16 km (10 mi) east of Hagensborg (crossing the Bella Coola River), and a few meters further, on the right side, a newly raised totem pole.

NUXALK RADIO

While in the valley, listen to Nuxalk Radio broadcasting on 91.1 FM. Nuxalk Radio is a non-commercial community radio station from the Nuxalk village of Q’umk’uts’ (Bella Coola) and worldwide online.

THE PETROGLYPHS

An absolute MUST cultural experience for Valley visitors is the short hike to the petroglyphs at Thorsen Creek. Both out of due respect for the Nuxalk people, and to enrich the experience, visitors are strongly urged to engage a Nuxalk guide whose mission is both to protect the site and to share Nuxalk culture through authentic chants and legends. Tours through Copper Sun Journeys. (see ad on Trails p.8).
Here, you will discover, nestled in the lush rainforest moss and ferns of a canopy forest, rock carvings believed to be at least 3,500 years old. These marvels are firmly rooted in today’s Nuxalk culture like the over-arching hemlock and cedar trees in this hallowed place where winter dances were performed by countless generations. Here, Nuxalk chiefs taught their successors in a landscape that evokes a sacred, cathedral-like awe—a landscape viewed by many as the spiritual heart of the Bella Coola Valley.

**POTLATCH**

Nuxalk Nation families often invite the entire Valley as well as “outsiders” to share in this age-old custom of formal dedications, feasting, singing, and dancing (with masks, in traditional attire). These events can begin with breakfast and last well into the night, sometimes for days.

A potlatch is not staged for spectators: It is a genuine practice that reinforces social structure, affirms ancestral territory, and maintains governance. Visiting participants are often welcome to drop in and may be asked to bring their own plates, cups, and cutlery—nothing more. Check the local bulletin boards and newspaper (or drop by the Nuxalk Administration office at Four-Mile) to learn if a potlatch will occur during your Bella Coola adventure. Visit www.nuxalknation.ca.

**BELLA COOLA MUSEUM**

The Bella Coola Museum, located on the Bella Coola Townsite, reflects the varied history of the Valley from the First Peoples, to the early explorers, to the coming of the pioneers, and the building of the ‘Freedom Road’. The museum is housed in a former schoolhouse and surveyor’s cabin—a heritage log building built in 1892. On display are items brought by Norwegian settlers and photographs that depict the days of the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post.

Phone: Museum (250) 799-5767, Archives (250) 982-2130. www.bellacoolamuseum.ca.

**NORWEGIAN HERITAGE HOUSE**

For a glimpse into the lifestyle of the early Norwegian-speaking settlers, visit this site in Hagensborg. The hewn-log house was moved to its present location from its original homestead site 3 km (1.8 mi) up the Valley. A stop of interest sign, here, describes the early Norwegian settlement.
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Please see the Bella Coola Valley Trail Guide for hiking details.