

UCLUELET: LIFE ON THE EDGE A WILD PACIFIC ADVENTURE

By Ron Kirstein, Edited by Linda Kirstein

Linda and I are ready to go to Ucluelet and our excitement is building. We awake early the morning of our trip like excited school kids. We know we are in for a great time. Ucluelet and Long Beach form our favorite part of Vancouver Island. The feeling we get on Long Beach between Ucluelet in the south and Tofino in the north is mystical. It doesn't matter if we are there in full sun or on a rainy day. The views of the expansive beaches, the sounds the waves make breaking on the shore, and the sheer beauty of the area is second to none. So we load up and head up island from Victoria. But guess what? It is raining like crazy. More rain has fallen today than in the last 3 months combined. The weather ahead does not look promising, but hey, we are headed for Ucluelet. It just won't matter.



Entering UCLUELET

We stop on the way at **Heritage Cottage** in Qualicum Beach for our first night with owners Hal and Jody. It shortens the drive and gives us an opportunity to golf at Arrowsmith Golf Club. Or so we think. At tee-time, the tee is underwater, so we pay homage to the god of tourist traps and visit the best little tourist trap in the world, the Coombs Country Market, mostly so I can have an ice cream cone. If you order one, skip your next meal. We have time on our hands so we also check out Top Bridge Park, a suspension bridge on a trail connecting Top Bridge Park with Englishman River Park. The suspension bridge crosses the Englishman River over a spectacular gorge.

The next morning, after one of Jody's spectacular breakfasts at the Heritage Cottage B&B, we head for Port Alberni and then on to Ucluelet.

We arrive at lunch time and check out **Delicado's Restaurant**. Ryan our host makes us feel right at home. Linda orders the 3-Salad Special. She chooses a combination of Thai Noodle, Spinach and Artichoke, and something Ryan concocted, Edamame Salad. All are very tasty. I chose the Southwestern Roll-up, yummy. The servings are substantial and we are ready for our afternoon adventure. Try Delicado's for great southwestern style food, friendly service and funky décor.

Our destination for day one in Ucluelet is the **Majestic Bed and Breakfast and Majestic Kayaking**. When we arrive we are greeted by Tracy and Ted Eeftink. Tracy suggests that we take their shuttle boat out to the Broken Group Islands to drop off and pick up kayak tours. This will give us a good idea how the business operates. She turns



Courtesy of Majestic Kayaking

us over to Gary Bostrom, the congenial skipper of his boat, the Ms. Judy. On the way out to Barkley Sound we happen across a group of about eight humpback whales. Several are extremely large and they provide us with a few tail shots. It is really hard to photograph whales from a moving boat, so I get many shots of the ocean! The scenery is spectacular with islands and rocks everywhere. We are very glad Gary is in charge. He really knows



Loading back onto Gary's boat

his way around. After the first drop of two kayakers, Gary pulls up his prawn traps with dozens of wriggling pink prawns for his dinner. Then we are off to pick up 11 kayakers finishing a day trip. The kayakers and their guides arrive right on time. We are amazed by how Gary and the two guides have everyone off the beach and onto the boat, kayaks and all in about 20 minutes.

quickly provides the gear, while Ted readies the kayaks. Ted is very helpful fitting us into our kayaks and adjusting the pedals. We paddle throughout the harbor in the late afternoon sun. The water is calm and the trip is very relaxing. Ted explains about the history of the harbor and what we see there. It is hard not to notice the rusty color of the water in the harbor and in Barkley Sound as well. Ted explains that every August there is a red plankton bloom. The plankton forms the bottom of the food chain and provides food for the pilchards and herring. These small fish provide food for the whales which are plentiful in the Broken Group Islands. The humpback whales migrate yearly to the

Arriving back at Majestic Kayaking, Tracy sets us up for a tour of Ucluelet Harbor with Ted. The shop is equipped for every need a kayaker might have. Tracy

west coast of Vancouver Island because of this food. Grey (baleen) whales also migrate here because of the plankton, one of their sources of food.



A large bald eagle in the harbor

In the harbor we see a number of sea lions, one floating on his back with its flippers sticking out of the water – a weird and unusual sight. We also see lots of harbor seals, many coming quite close to have a look at us. Ted tells us that yesterday killer whales came right into the harbor in search of food. No such luck for us today. Back at Majestic Kayaking I

watch one of the guides prepare a group for a tour of the harbor. They are very professional and make sure everyone is properly suited up, comfortable and prepared for their paddle. They have tons of equipment on site and offer a variety of tours. We are very impressed by Tracy and Ted's kayaking operation.

We clean up after our kayak tour and drive into town. We hungrily tuck into our dinner at Matterson House, a restaurant recommend by several locals. We return to **Majestic B&B** and find it to be one of the best organized B&B's we have ever stayed. It was designed and built as a Bed and Breakfast, so we have great privacy in a two bedroom suite. Our harbor-view room is very comfy with a queen size bed and a large screen TV. The floors

are heated and our ensuite bathroom is roomy with a walk-in shower. The B&B is playfully decorated in a west coast theme. Breakfast is served in a common room with a TV and internet access. Breakfast consists of fresh fruit with granola and yogurt on the side, fruit juice, coffee or tea, and a tasty breakfast quiche. After breakfast we bid Tracy and Ted, our wonderful hosts, farewell and are on to our next adventure. They do a fine job of introducing us to kayaking in Ucluelet and the wonders of Barkley Sound.

Around noon we check in with **Jamie's Whaling Station and Adventure Centre**. After we get our boarding passes we suit up in sophisticated red survival suits and walk down the ramp to meet Jessie who is our skipper and guide for the afternoon. Jessie is a delightful and enthusiastic tour guide. She is as excited as we are to see each whale. Just outside the harbor, off Starlight Reef, we come across a humpback who must be the cousin of the Eveready Energizer Bunny. Linda and I have seen a lot of whales over the years but we have never seen anything like this one as we watch for the next two hours. *Our whale* never stops performing for the entire time we are with him. If he (or she, Linda adds) is not breaching (jumping clearly out of the water), he



Humpback Tail Shot



**Humpback Whale Full Breach –
Courtesy of Koen Rietveld**

does massive flips where much of his body flips and slaps against the water. He also lies on his side and waves his fins or does a deep dive to give us great photo opportunities of his large tail. Even Jessie is impressed and she has done this hundreds of times.

This whale is a one-man show. We finally tear our eyes away and speed over to a nearby island to observe a colony of Steller sea lions. Being

such massive animals, they are ungainly as they maneuver themselves over the rocks. In the water, they do a graceful ballet, as they check out the strangers in red suits who suddenly arrive in their midst.



**Powerful verticle thrust from the
ocean Courtesy of Koen Rietveld**

Then Jessie our guide speeds us off to find some more whales. The ride through the waves is cowboy style, fast, wild and wet. I think it is more for the fun of it than it is for the whales. We bounce around on our seats and kick up a lot of water. Linda and I are pretty glad we are in the back of the boat however we are not immune to the *rinse cycle*. It is a lot of fun and everyone is enjoying the ride. We do find a couple more whales but their behavior is sedate compared to the *Viagra* charged Energizer Bunny.

Soon we head back to the dock where we disembark, peel off our wet survival suits and enjoy coffee and hot chocolate. Jamie's Whale Watching delivers a quality product and offers a guarantee that you will see whales or have a complementary tour the next day. We highly recommend Jamie's. We have a great time and feel incredibly lucky to see such a show.



Photo Courtesy of Black Rock Resort

We drive across the peninsula to the **Black Rock Resort** and check in for the next two nights. It is evident as we approach the resort that this is someplace special. The resort is architecturally stunning and sits in a spectacular setting on an ocean-side cliff just north of Big Beach. It is literally on the

edge of the Pacific Coast, the next stop is Japan. Décor is modern with a west coast edge and the attention to detail is evident. The walk-in shower has room for a party of six, the towels are fluffy and the free-standing tub provides ocean views through windows that open over the bed. The balcony has a sweeping view of Big Beach and the bay in front of it. As we step out we immediately spot humpback whales going by. As Linda enjoys a glass of wine and the view, I make my way to the **Drift Spa** for a massage. The spa is well appointed with a relaxing atmosphere. The staff are warm and friendly, and my massage is very effective in relaxing my over-worked core muscles from our whale watching tour.

After the spa, Linda and I make our way to our reservation in the resort's **Fetch Restaurant**. We start with a couple of delectable appetizers. Linda orders the pepper crusted Beef Carpaccio with grilled hearts of radicchio in a sherry orange dressing. I have a huge Butter Basted Scallop with a fennel snap pea sauté in



Food at Fetch Restaurant Black Rock



Linda in Fetch - what a view

dungeness crab bisque. These creative and exceptionally well presented appetizers disappear too quickly. Delicious! Linda chooses a Dijon Glazed Pork Loin with caramelized gala apples and potato rosti in cider jus for her main course. I order the pan seared Pacific Halibut with comfit of yukon gold potatoes, leeks and spiced chorizo sausage in citrus crème fraiche. Both meals are delectable and leave us with an amazing after-taste. We appreciate

the talents of the chef! Linda notices three women eyeing everything that comes to our table. We strike up a conversation and find out they are in Ucluelet on a fishing trip. I ask what I should call three women here from Vancouver fishing and they simultaneously respond “Broads with Rods”! They even have their own T-shirts. Minutes later, one of the three yells “whales, I see whales”, which excites the other two. Upon close inspection, we discover the whales are not moving. It’s just the waves over the rocks! Soon thereafter, our waiter arrives with the dessert list. We cannot resist temptation but find it hard to choose from the menu. Linda goes for the Pavlova with Seasonal Berries and I pick the Chocolate Brownie with Caramel Ice cream. I win! Linda’s is very good, but the decadent brownie I have is so good, I have to share it with Linda. Good thing because it saves me about 500 calories. What a truly great meal. Fetch is one of the best restaurants in Ucluelet, if not the best! It certainly gets our vote.

Back in the room, as we prepare for sleep, we listen to the rush of waves on the beach, just outside our balcony door. We fall asleep in paradise and look forward to our next adventure in the morning. We awake to those same gentle waves and a bright sunny day. We drive back downtown for a cinnamon bun and coffee for breakfast at UKEE DOGS. Ukee is local lingo for Ucluelet). We don’t feel like eating a big breakfast after our outstanding meal at Fetch last night.

Our adventure today is with **Archipelago Cruises** operated by Al and Toddy Landry. We board the luxurious yacht, the **Raincoast Maiden** at 10 AM and begin our luxury wildlife cruise through the Broken Group Islands in Barkley Sound. Within minutes of leaving the dock, Al pilots the boat near a large bald eagle with two chicks. The cameras start to click. Then Toddy spots a bear and we motor close by. The bear ate a breakfast of grass on the shore of Ucluelet Harbor providing us with more great photo opportunities. Soon we leave the harbor and within minutes we see a humpback whale. The whale gives us a very good show. Next stop is seal viewing on a rugged cluster of rocks. Most of these rocks also have sea birds such as cormorants, oyster catchers, gulls, and common murrens. Leaving the seals we pass more rocks covered with Steller sea lions and a few California sea lions. Some are



Black Bear Ucluelet Harbor



Sea lion diving from the rocks

growing, others barking and a few are fighting with each other. Moving along we arrive at a large kelp bed where we find “Ollie” the Otter wrapped in kelp to keep from floating away. Ollie seems somewhat ambivalent to our presence. It is hard to tell if he is sleeping or just relaxing. His pink mouth opens in a big yawn. Ollie is so friendly that he is likely the most photographed sea otter on the west coast. As our adventure unfolds we travel through some amazing scenery. All throughout the trip Al

provides us with incredibly interesting information about our surroundings, the wildlife and local history. He even gives us a great lesson on how to adjust binoculars. Each of us is provided with a pair of binoculars for our viewing pleasure. Toddy often repeats in German what Al says in English. There are a number of Europeans on this tour and most speak German. Fortunately Toddy is multilingual.

It is now lunch time and our guides shift into high gear. Before our eyes the yacht is turned into a dining room. We all have a table and are served a gourmet picnic lunch prepared by **Norwood's Restaurant**. Locals also highly recommend this restaurant. The lunch is very tasty and far exceeds our expectations for a lunch at sea. After lunch, we start our return trip to the harbor.



Gourmet Lunch from Norwood's

Along the way we see several more humpback whales. They seem to be everywhere. Al points out a number of first nation "middens". These are sea side locations where First Nations people once resided. As they lived off the sea, the sites became very deep in sea shells, up to 10 feet, and trees can no longer grow on this land. So there are occasional green spaces in the forest and these are the old middens. This is typical of the stories and information provided us during our trip. We also learn the interesting history of Captain Charles William Barkley, whom Barkley Sound is named after.

I know of no other service where you can have an experience like this. Most tours are specialized, like whale watching, or bear viewing, whereas this 5-6 hour tour provides us with the viewing of so much wildlife. Our tour is relaxed and we are not rushed at any point. We have plenty of time with each critter we encounter. It is truly a fantastic voyage and one that I would certainly recommend to all my friends. On the yacht you can sit on the bow, or go topside under the cover of canvas, or sit on a soft couch or chair inside the main cabin. This is truly a luxury cruise. I remember Al saying "don't worry about the boat, you cannot hurt it". This certainly makes us feel comfortable and welcome aboard (which is also their home). Al also gets everyone to introduce themselves before we get underway. All our needs are taken care of by the amiable pair, Al and Toddy. Well done!



Linda with Raincoast Maiden

We spend some of our time on the Wild Pacific Trail. This is such a gem that visitors to Ucluelet should not miss it. It runs from the south tip of the



The Wild Pacific Trail

peninsula at Amphitrite Point and Light Station, about 8 km towards the north, along the shoreline of the wild Pacific Ocean. There are so *many viewing spots to see the beaches and rocky* ocean shoreline. Each view is different and equally spectacular. The trail also passes by the **Black Rock Resort**. While staying there, we walk a bit of the trail, down to Browns Beach. We have been on the trail in bright sunlight and in the fog and each vista offers a different kind of beauty. One day we will be there during the winter storms when the Pacific Ocean gets really wild! Stay tuned.

Our evening meal is at the **Offshore Restaurant**. They serve an extensive selection of seafood, and this restaurant is also recommended by locals. It is quite small so make reservations in advance.

In the morning we reluctantly say goodbye to the **Black Rock Resort**. It is such a beautiful place to stay that we hate to leave. The employees are so friendly and accommodating, it is easy to tell that the management is excellent. Very impressive!

Our next adventure is with **Beachcomber Ocean Tours**. Cameron MacPherson is our skipper and tour guide. Cam holds a masters ticket of ships not more than 350 tons from the Department of Transport. We travel on the 30 foot, 12 passenger MV Blackfish. It is a covered and heated boat with a washroom and enough room on the aft deck outside for everyone when viewing the wildlife and whales. I also find it easy to photograph wildlife through the sliding windows from inside the boat. The MV Blackfish is Transport Canada certified with full electronics and safety gear.

Cam, our tour guide is well versed in local history, native culture and also marine history. He provides a running commentary about what we are seeing, the names of the islands, waters, channels, etc. and how that all relates to the history in the area. It is most interesting.



Sea Lions in the Broken Group

We have some excellent whale sightings on this tour. On one occasion, two whales surface just meters in front of the boat and Cam has to shift into reverse in order to miss the whales. This is truly a close encounter.

We also make stops by the sea lion colonies at Sea Lion Rocks. Sea lions are so powerful and so big, some reach 2000 pounds. Interestingly, seals and sea lions are not related to each other.

A highlight of this tour includes a visit to the community of Bamfield some 25 miles from Ucluelet on the other side of Barkley Sound. We have the choice of visiting the Bamfield Marine Science Centre, walk the boardwalk to the General Store, or enjoy a lunch in the Bistro. We chose to have lunch and mix in with the locals and other visitors.



Bamfield General Store & Boardwalk



Very Large Sea Cave

The trip through the Broken Group Islands is spectacular. You just never know what you will see. There are a lot of caves carved into the rocks by the pounding surf. Cam takes us by one very large cave that we can see right through. The people who kayak the Broken Group get to poke their kayaks into these caves and onto the beautiful sandy beaches scattered through the islands. We pass a lot of kayakers while on our tour. This area is one of the most popular in the world for ocean kayaking and it is very easy to see why. Each of our tours and trips through

Barkley Sound and the Broken Group Islands has its own special features and Cam's is not different. He certainly has a very deep knowledge of the area and is willing to share it with his guests.

On our tours this trip we have seen scores of humpback whales, eagles, a bear, an otter, seals, sea lions, hundreds if not thousands of sea birds and some of the most fantastic scenery on the planet. The stories and history told by our guides make it that much more interesting. Linda and I hope you have enjoyed this visit to Ucluelet. It is an outstanding location for a Wildlife Adventure. We have also prepared a few videos from our adventure which you can see at: [VIDEOS](#) and a host of addition pictures at:

[PICTURES](#)

If you want to learn more about Ucluelet, [CLICK HERE](#)

Also visit our partners in this article:

[Archipelago Wildlife Cruises](#)

[Beachcomber Ocean Adventure Tours](#)

[Black Rock Oceanfront Resort](#)

[Delicado's Restaurant](#)

[Fetch Restaurant at Black Rock Oceanfront Resort](#)

[Jamie's Whaling Station and Adventure Centre](#)

[Majestic B&B and Kayaking Adventure Centre](#)

[Norwood's Restaurant](#) (site under construction)

SPECIALS AND DEALS IN UCLUELET:

[Majestic Ocean B&B](#) – Offers 25% off at the bed and breakfast, when you book one of our multi day kayak trips. From October 1st - May 1st, we offer our rooms at \$125.00 per night if it's just for one night, and \$95.00 per night for multiple night stays (based on double occupancy).

[Bostrom's B&B on Little Beach Bay:](#) "Come stay with Gary and the real Ms. Judy on the ocean front Bostrom's B&B On Little Beach Bay. Mention that you have read this article and get complimentary seafood hors d'oeuvres. See what Gary has caught for you this time. Offer good from October 10, 2009 to March 10, 2010." **Minimum 2 night stay.**

The He-Tin-Kis Lodge, 366 Reef Point Road, Ucluelet, B.C. “Multi-Night Specials” offered year-round. Receive -10% off when booking 3 or more nights. The private, self-contained, oceanfront suites have exceptional ocean views, designer décor, a private beach area, and much more!! 1-877-726-2928 / email; info@hetinkislodge.com

Mussel Beach Campground offers you a 6 night stay for regular price and get the 7th night for free during the month of September 2009 and during the months of May and June 2010. Just mention the offer found in the Ucluelet Article.

Jamie’s Whaling Station In effect at our Ucluelet Adventure Centre aboard the 65’ Lady Selkirk until Sept 30th. For each full fare Adult, Senior or Student ticket purchased, one passenger 18 years of age or under will be admitted FREE! This special offer applies to the 65’ vessel Lady Selkirk, departing from 168 Fraser Lane in Ucluelet!

Family Special Prices:

Adult	\$99.00
Senior	95.00
Student (over 18)	95.00
18 & under (with parent)	FREE!
Baby (under 3 yr)	Free

** not combined with any other discounts or special offers**

The **Surfs Inn Backpackers and Rainforest Cottages** have joined forces **with** **Relic Surf Shop** to bring you some amazing ‘Stay and Surf’ packages in the Ucluelet/Long Beach area. The Surfs Inn has options from budget shared rooms to private rooms to private high end suites and cottages set in the coast’s beautiful rainforest. Relic Surf Shop offers top of the line rental gear to keep you warm and comfortable even in the coldest of waters.

‘Stay and Surf’ packages are based on a 2 night minimum and include the accommodation as well as surf rental gear for the two days (board, suit, booties, hoody, gloves and roof racks). Lessons are recommended but must be booked in advance to ensure availability.

\$40 per night per person in a shared room in the main guesthouse

\$45 per night per person for a private room in the main guesthouse (based on 2 ppl)

\$50 per night per person for a private suite in a rainforest cottage (based on 2 ppl)

Lessons are an additional \$30 per person for a 3 hour group lesson. (min 2 ppl)

www.relicsurfshop.com

250 726 4421

1998 Peninsula Road

www.surfsinn.ca

250 726 4426

1874 Peninsula Road