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COMOX VALLEY ECHO



Six-year-old Morgan, Fisher and Pinel's son, is already a veteran of kayaking adventures despite his tender age.

Valley company's kayak vacations in the international spotlight with new designation

By Philip Round
Echo Staff

A vacation package offered by a Courtenay company has been chosen as one of the Canadian Tourism Commission's recommended extraordinary experiences for visitors.

West Coast Expeditions' five-day sea otter kayak tour is one of nearly 30 vacation ideas from across the country now added to CTC's 'Canadian Signature Experiences' collection being promoted internationally.

The kayak vacation generally starts in the Comox Valley, where guests often stop over at the Holiday Inn Express or the Old House Village Inn and Suites before being transported by Ambassador Shuttle Services to a water taxi that takes them on to Spring Island in Kyuquot Sound, off the northwest coast of Vancouver Island.

From there, participants explore waters in the traditional territory of the Kyuquot-Checleset First Nations. West Coast Expeditions' base camp serves as the hub for what the company describes as "world-class paddling suited to novice and experienced kayakers alike."

The experience is intended to connect visitors with the human and ecological story of the remote coastal location.

Guests enjoy unexpected comforts of a wilderness retreat complete with beds, hot showers and gourmet meals, including a traditional salmon feast hosted by a local aboriginal family.

(Continued on page 2)



Caroline Fisher and David Pinel, co-owners of Courtenay-based West Coast Expeditions.

LUCK OF THE DRAW

Edwin Grieve retains CVRD board chair after two tied votes

By Philip Round
Echo Staff

It was the luck of the draw that saw Edwin Grieve re-elected as chair of Comox Valley Regional District's board of directors on Tuesday.

At the authority's annual meeting, there were two nominations for the position - Grieve, who represents rural Area C (Puntledge-Black Creek), and Courtenay City Coun. Bill Anglin.

Both were given three minutes to pitch for support from the ten-member board before a secret write-in ballot vote.

Grieve highlighted progress and cooperation on a number of big issues and called for continuity and consolidation. Anglin praised Grieve's leadership but thought as a relatively new member of the board he could bring a fresh perspective and become a catalyst for further change.

The CVRD's corporate legislative officer James Warren conducted the ballot, but when the result was announced it was a dead-heat tie.

Board members were given a few moments to reflect on the situation and then asked to vote again. The result was the same.

Warren said under the procedural bylaw, the issue had to be resolved for the next 12 months, so unless the board thought it worthwhile having a third vote, the choice would be determined on the drawing of lots.

He wrote the two candidates' names on pieces of paper and invited the current board vice-chair, Courtenay Coun. Jon Ambler, to draw a name at random from the box. It was Grieve's - and the board united in applause.

In accepting the position, Grieve reiterated that much had been achieved by working together, "and focusing on benefits for all our residents - rural and urban - and that is how we will have success in the future."

He said there would continue to be strong fiscal management, balancing costs with the need to provide good service to residents. "Good discussion leads to good decisions, and that's what we need to continue as we move forward," he added.

The board then went on to re-elect Jon Ambler as vice-chair by acclamation when he was the only nomination.

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Edwin Grieve (left) and Jon Ambler after their reappointments as chair and vice-chair of the CVRD board respectively for another year.

Shuttle company bids to offer more choice of taxi service

By Philip Round
Echo Staff

A bid to introduce some choice into local taxi operations is being made by the owner of Ambassador Shuttle Service, Kevin East.

He has applied to the BC Passenger Transportation Board for an amendment to his current licence that would allow him to run a taxi service, permitting him to pick up people who hail or flag from the street, and charge metered rates for journeys.

At present, his licence restricts his operations to pre-booked trips under limited conditions.

But Dave Smith, the owner of Comox Taxi - the only authorized full-blown taxi service in the Comox Valley - has submitted a formal objection to East's application and gathered a bunch of supporters, including the BC Taxi Association, for his cause.

Representations for or against the application had to be in the hands of the Passenger Transportation Board by last night (Thursday).

Shortly, East will be shown the content of all submissions and will be given ten days to respond in writing to any points raised. A Passenger Transportation Board

panel will then be convened to consider and rule on the application.

East told the Echo he had not applied for a full taxi licence before, but believed customers in the Comox Valley should have some choice, especially as people often raised the issue of having to wait longer than they would wish for service.

His application was for just four vehicles to be authorized, barely a quarter of the licences held by the other company in town.

Further, he was offering to the Board that two of his four vehicles would be accessible for wheelchair users, which he believed in reality had been a gap in the local taxi market for almost two years.

His application states that each of his four vehicles would have a capacity of not less than six and not more than 11 passengers plus the driver. Pick up would be allowed from anywhere in the Comox Valley from Coleman Road (Merville) south to Deep Bay, and drop off could be anywhere in B.C.

If the licence amendment were to be granted, Ambassador would be allowed to transport passengers back to the Comox Valley from elsewhere in B.C. if the return journey was arranged before the completion of the outward trip.

"I want to offer more options to people in this community, to give people some choice," he told the Echo. "This is not about all-out competition. They (Comox Taxi) will continue to be the main player and I will continue to support cooperation between the companies in the best interests of passengers."

He has asked the Board to approve metered rates, including GST, of \$3.55 for the initial "flag" and \$2.15 for each additional kilometre travelled. Stopping or waiting time would be charged at \$44.37 an hour.

(Continued on page 2)

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Comox Valley Weather



Friday, 13 December
Cloudy.
High 6°C.



Saturday, 14 December
Rain.
Low 5°C. High 6°C.



Sunday, 15 December
Periods of rain.
Low 4°C. High 7°C.



Monday, 16 December
Cloudy with 70% chance of showers.
Low 4°C. High 7°C.



Tuesday, 17 December
Periods of rain.
Low 5°C. High 7°C.

For the latest Comox Valley Weather visit: www.comoxvalleyecho.com



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Valley company's kayak vacations in the international spotlight

(Continued from page 1)

Daily outings feature sea otters, intertidal critters, estuaries, old-growth forests, sand and shell beaches, rugged sea arches and even caves. WCE co-owner and guide Caroline Fisher has been a world traveller all her life, and has worked in the adventure tourism industry for more than 20 years.

"Now as a tourism business owner I feel extremely proud and excited to have one of our trips selected as an extraordinary Canadian tourism experience that will be showcased to the world," she says.

Managing owner and guide David Pinel - who is also coordinator of adventure guiding certificate programs with North Island College - adds: "We love sharing the wonders of the rich coastal ecosystem here, especially through intimate small-group experiences and unscripted cultural interactions."

"Many guests local to Vancouver Island and Vancouver have been regulars with us over the years. Being featured now as a new member of the Canadian Signature Experiences collection is huge for us as a small operator on the western edge of Canada - what an honour."

Pinel says three of the company's regular staff live and work in the Comox Valley - Serina Bain and Lennie Allison are guides, and Sherryl Eagle



Staff of West Coast Expeditions ready to greet incoming guests on Spring Island.

helps manage the local office. "Our son Morgan - who is six years old - is also very much part of our operation," he adds. "Some guests joke that they won't return unless he's in camp at the same time! He's been with us for most weeks each summer since before

he was one year old."

Fisher and Pinel jointly own WCE with Kyuquot-Checleset First Nation local, Bev Hansen-Michel, who says the CTC recognition further boosts their confidence and reach for welcoming more international guests.

Currently, almost a third of all bookings are from people in the Comox Valley - or are connected with someone coming to the Valley, such as friends of locals from away visiting them here as part of a wider itinerary.

Pinel adds that there are other local spin-offs for the Valley, even though the focus of their tours is the west coast.

"We've enjoyed working with Comox Valley Kayaks for over 15 years to ensure we have a top quality and diverse fleet of kayaks each summer; and we have launched a new "East meets West" cycling and kayaking package working with another local company, Island Joy Rides.

"And we are sponsors of the Strathcona Nordics Ski Club and ELM (Equilibrium Lifestyle Management) - we like supporting active lifestyles!"

For the Canadian Tourism Commission, Greg Klassen says the 'signature experiences' collection being promoted is "just one of the ways we carve out Canada's piece of the global tourism pie."

He adds: "This third intake of tourism businesses will help travel agents and tour operators in our international markets make an even more compelling case to travellers that their next destination should be Canada."

And the federal government's minister responsible for tourism and small business, Maxime Bernier, adds the collection "recognizes truly authentic Canadian experiences that entice travellers and position Canada as a destination of choice on the world stage while creating jobs and growth here at home."

Shuttle company bids to offer more choice of taxi

(Continued from page 1)

But for Comox Taxi, Smith said there was simply not enough business in town to justify granting even more licences. "Adding four more licences just doesn't add up," he said. "This town has not recovered from the economic downturn yet."

"Our fleet is operating at less than 50 per cent capacity at the present time. Revenues are down; trips are down; expenses are up."

Even business demand for the door-to-door delivery of items as opposed to people had fallen so far service had been discontinued last month, he noted.

Smith said Comox Taxi's fleet currently included 13 conventional taxis, and they also have two passenger vans and a 50-seat coach.

On December 5 he reintroduced one wheelchair accessible van, having taken two such vehicles off the road in the past because of what he considered to be minimal demand.

"We get just one or two requests a month (for wheelchair using passengers) - you can't cater for that: it's just not economical," he said. "But we'll be writing out to the hospital and care homes to let them know we're giving it another try."

Smith said while Comox Taxi had approval to operate up to 15 taxis at one time, there were usually no more than ten vehicles on the road in the daytime and up to 13 at night.

Clearly, he added, demand was greater at limited

times such as New Year's Eve, but his costs and commitments needed to continue all year round, and he had more than 55 people working for him, many on minimum wage apart from the tips they earned.

A spokesperson for the Passenger Transportation Board said the panel would take three things in to account in considering the application.

In simple terms, they were: Is there a public need for the proposed service? Is the applicant a fit and proper person who will be capable of operating the service? And on the issue of ensuring sound economics in passenger transportation services, will introducing competition be healthy or destructive?

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CRAFT SATURDAY AT THE MUSEUM

The Courtenay Museum invites you to have fun making some good old fashioned Christmas Crafts.

Enjoy making a variety of crafts, such as decorated pine cones, Christmas stockings and trees.

This year we are introducing a new craft, decorate an Elasmosaur to hang on your Christmas tree!

A Craft Saturday is being held on Saturday December 14th from 11am - 3pm. Everyone is welcome. Admission is by donation.

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No passes: Nightly: 6:30, 10:00;
THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG 2D (PG) No passes:
Sat/Sun Mats 11:40, 3:00;
TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE (14A) Fri-Tue 6:55, 9:50;
Sat/Sun Mats 2:00
THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE (PG) Nightly 6:45, 9:50;
Sat/Sun Mats 11:50, 3:10;
FROZEN 3D (G) Nightly: 7:05, 9:40;
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NANAIMO (DEPARTURE BAY) - HORSESHOE BAY
October 15 to December 19, 2013

Leave Horseshoe Bay		Leave Departure Bay	
6:30 am	3:00 pm	6:30 am	3:00 pm
8:30 am	5:00 pm	8:30 am	5:00 pm
10:30 am	7:00 pm	10:30 am	7:00 pm
12:30 pm	9:00 pm	12:30 pm	9:00 pm

1) Fri, Sat & Sun only

NANAIMO (DUKE POINT) - TSAWWASSEN
October 15 to March 31, 2014

Leave Duke Point		Leave Tsawwassen	
5:15 am	3:15 pm	5:15 am	3:15 pm
7:45 am	5:45 pm	7:45 am	5:45 pm
10:15 am	8:15 pm	10:15 am	8:15 pm
12:45 pm	10:45 pm	12:45 pm	10:45 pm

1) Daily except Sat, Sun, Dec 25, & Jan 1; 2) Daily except Sun, Dec 25, & Jan 1; 3) Daily except Sat, 4) Daily except Sat, and Dec 25, & Jan 1

COMOX (LITTLE RIVER) - POWELL RIVER
April 1, 2013 to January 11, 2014

Leave Comox		Leave Powell River	
6:30 am	3:15 pm	8:10 am	5:15 pm
10:10 am	7:15 pm	12:00 pm	8:45 pm

1) Daily except Dec 25 and Jan 1;

Look for these **layar** features in today's Echo:

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- Layar Instructions.....B7

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MARKET REPORT

TSX Composite	13324.01	Stock Watch	
DJIA	15973.13	Royal Bank	69.35
Gold	1256.80	TD Bank	95.96
Cdn\$	0.9425US\$	Bank of Nova Scotia	63.80
ETFs & Global Investments			
Claymore BRIC (CBQ)	24.06	BCE	46.63
BHP Billiton ADR (BHP)	66.81US\$	Potash Corp. of Sask.	32.91
Power Shrs. QQQ	86.28US\$	Suncor Energy Inc	36.05
Aberdeen Asia Pacific (FAP)	5.70	Crescent Point Energy	40.55
S&P 500 (XIU)	19.31	Cdn. Oil Sands	18.85
Government Bonds			
5 year (CDN)	1.79%	Husky Energy	31.35
10 year (CDN)	2.62%	Pembina Pipe Line	34.16
30 year (CDN)	3.18%	TransCanada Corp	46.89
30 year Treasury bonds (US)	3.85%	Teck Resources Ltd.	25.55
Investment Trusts			
Fixed Income GICs		Cameco	22.28
Home Trust Company 1 yr.	1.65%	Brookfield Renewable Energy Partners	27.75
ING Bank of Canada 3 yr.	2.02%	Morguard Real Estate Inv. Tr.	16.13
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