

Vancouver to Victoria

19th July – 3rd August 2016

So we've crossed a few borders over the last 2 years and almost without exception they've all gone smoothly. Getting into Azerbaijan took a while but they gave us tea and Snickers while we waited. Getting out of Uzbekistan was delayed when they asked for registration slips from hotels for each night of our stay, luckily an unenforceable rule that just required us to smile and shake our heads until they let us through. Other than that it's hardly taken a few minutes to get into the next country.

We imagined that getting into Canada would be another straightforward process, we're coming into the Commonwealth after all. The trouble is when your answer to "What's your current line of employment?" Is "unemployed cyclist" and "when did you last have a job?" Is "2014" it triggers certain alarm bells with the immigration officer. We'd left Hokkaido at 1:30pm and it's now 8pm on the same day. In between we've had a 3 hour flight to Shanghai, sat there for 8 hours then taken another 10 hour flight to Vancouver. Suffice to say we're exhausted, confused, hungry and just want to pedal the few km to our Warmshowers host and sleep. Do we really look like we're here to cause trouble? Actually my beard has grown a bit unruly.

Instead we're directed into a room of despondent looking Chinese and South East Asian travellers where we wait our turn for further investigations. After 90 minutes we're finally called forward and the officer takes one look at our bike and asks where we've been and where we're headed. "Sounds like quite a trip, keep safe as Canadian drivers are terrible" is as much as he has to say before sending us on our way. Finally we can get rolling on the North American leg of our journey but it's a good job they didn't find our contraband dairy and

meat products.



Beautiful BC, but bad drivers apparently



Colourful cement plant

We spend two days with Ian and Lis in the suburbs of Vancouver. They weren't fussed about our eventual very late arrival and offer us our own room where we can rest and sort ourselves out. Somehow barely sleeping on the plane has allowed me to slip into the new time zone, 16hrs behind Japan, fairly easily. Kirsty isn't so lucky and feels dreadful during daylight and wide awake at night. While she adapts I wonder around the city to see what makes it the best place to live in North America.

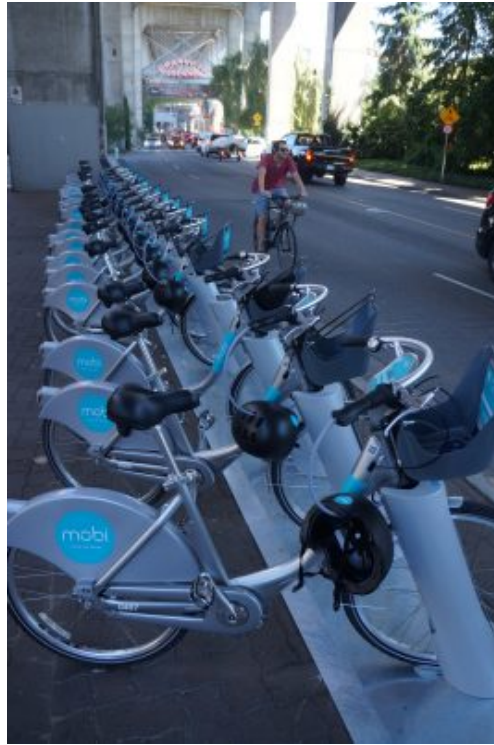


View of Downtown Vancouver from Queen Elizabeth Park

Although seeing it in the sunshine definitely helps, and is a rare thing apparently, there's a great feeling about the place. The mountainous backdrop to the downtown skyline makes it clear that when you live here the great outdoors is on your doorstep. In the city itself there are bikes everywhere and a brand new public bike service opens up on the day that we arrive to encourage even more people to get around on two wheels.



Mountains, beaches and a modern city.
What's not to like?



City bikes

Vancouver is also famous for its food and walking around I spot Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Greek, Indian and Turkish restaurants in one small area alone. There's no need to travel the world when you can taste it all here. The faces are multicultural too, much more than I expected, with communities from all parts of the world to match the cuisine.



Punjabi Market, Vancouver



Fruit stall on Granville
Island



Even the phones love
living here

Most big cities we've been to have been interesting but not immediately appealing as a place to live. Vancouver has

something different about it though and is probably the first place that, if push came to shove, would be a possibility as somewhere to stay longer.

To mark our arrival on a new continent I treat myself to a trim that is more severe than I would have liked. This has the benefit of making me look less like a Sasquatch and so less likely to be captured by a trophy hunter.



Before trim



After trim

After a couple of days Kirsty is slowly becoming conscious at the correct times so we decide to try getting going on the bike. We're heading east again, out of the city and into its numerous and familiarly named districts of Richmond, New Westminster, Surrey all making us feel like we're crossing London.



Ian, our host in Vancouver

Arriving in Japan is a big culture shock for most people flying in from the West but we'd approached it gradually so, although we had to get used to its more unique quirks it didn't seem quite so strange. It's more of a shock for us arriving here in Canada after so long in Asia. The tiny box cars have been replaced by enormous v8 pick ups. Houses are huge wooden bungalows surrounded by acres of lawn. There's so much space! At one point a train comes past and 15 minutes later it's still coming past. I give up counting somewhere around the 180th carriage.



Japanese Car Park



Canadian car park



Japanese magazines



Canadian magazines

One of our problems shopping in Japan was finding things in big enough quantities. Porridge oats (if we could find them at all) were sold in 300g bags that lasted 2 days. Here it's hard to buy anything in less than 3kg bags. The smallest bag of

crisps (sorry, potato chips) are 4 times the size of the largest Japanese equivalent. Milk is sold by the gallon which isn't much help when we only want a pint.



Sorry Kirsty but it's too big and too heavy

It's a nice change being able to read labels and signs and have conversations with people though. At a stop at a 7 11, which is one thing Canada does have in common with Japan, we get chatting to three different people and can actually answer their many questions. Translating from English to Canadian is very simple and just requires the addition of 'eh?' to the end of each sentence.



This chap had built his own bamboo bike as an 'art project'



Frazer River

We follow the Frazer valley out through Maple Ridge and Abbotsford and end the day in Chilliwack at the home of Ant and Rita. It's been fantastic making new friends all along our route but it's even better catching up with old ones, and I've known Ant nearly as long as I've known my own parents. We went to the same school at the age of 4 and have kept in touch ever

since even though the distance between us grew substantially when he moved here 10 years ago. This is the first time I've had a chance to visit so there's plenty of reminiscing to be done, no doubt boring our respective wives with tales of our irresponsible antics in the days of our youth. They have an adventure playground on their doorstep in the form of mountains and lakes and a garage full of toys to help them enjoy it to the full so I don't think Ant will be returning to Gloucestershire anytime soon.



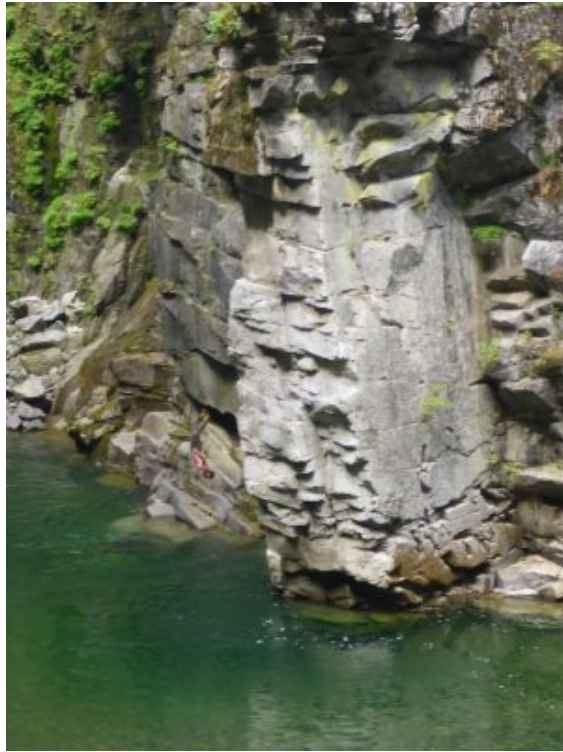
Ant, Rita and Kayla
outside the finest
German auto specialist
garage in the Frazer
Valley —
<http://www.hoodstarautomotive.com>



View of Chilliwack



A walk near Hope



Free climber taking a dive,
near Hope. Ant was going to
have a go too but forgot
his trunks.



Toy cupboard



Rita tries out the stoker seat



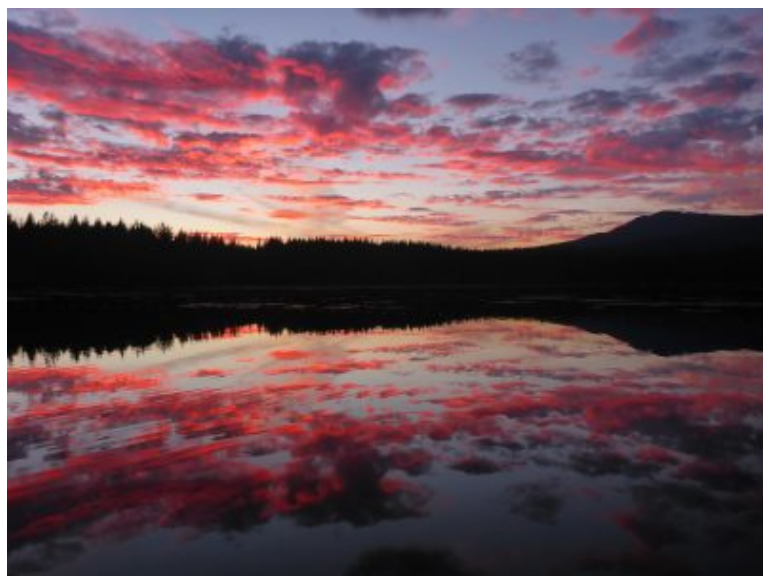
Friends Reunited

Through the wonders of Facetime we manage to catch up with another old friend, also an Anthony, back in Eastbourne for a reunion that is long overdue, even if it's only in cyberspace. The three of us comprise a mechanic with his own business, an opera singer and a cycling nomad. It's amazing the different directions our lives have followed from a shared childhood. The weekend goes all too quick though and soon it's time for Ant and Rita to return to work and for us to return to being unemployed cyclists.



Chilliwack is famous for its corn. None today though.

Retracing our tyre tracks to Maple Ridge we then turn up towards Belcarra after Port Moody. We're aiming for Deep Cove as we've been invited to stay with Tara's sister, Kirsten, and her family. Tara was our riding buddy in North West India and South Korea.



One of the best sunsets of the whole trip while camping at Whonnock lake

Deep Cove sits on the 'North Shore' on the other side of a stretch of water from the bulk of the city. It's also near the mouth of the Indian Arm, a fjord that stretches north of Vancouver and then comes down to join the Howe Sound before flowing out to sea. All this water makes it a fantastic location but makes it tricky for us to get to it. By road we'd have to go back into Vancouver, cross a bridge then come back on ourselves to follow the coast round and up the Indian Arm. However, taking a boat from Belcarra would save us this 40 km ride. There's no ferry across but luckily Kirsten has a friend who can help.



Canada. Geese.

We sit in the sunshine on the dock watching crabs being caught by a group of fishermen when a small tin boat arrives with Tanya on board and her furry co-pilot Rosa the labrador. There's just enough room to get the bike and bags in then we're treated to a leisurely tour of the cove complete with views up to Whistler and a bald eagle flying overhead. Once deposited back on dry land we offer our thanks and make the short spin up to Kirsten's house. Not just a handy shortcut but a very pleasant way to arrive too.



Catching crabs, Belcarra



Tanya and Rosa



Bald Eagle taking a break
on the Indian Arm



Just enough room for tandem and crew

It seems any friends of Tara are friends of Kirsten too so we're instantly made to feel at home along with husband Court and children Emma and Matt. The day ends with ice cream followed by all of us jumping off the end of the jetty into the refreshing water.



Kirsten and co.

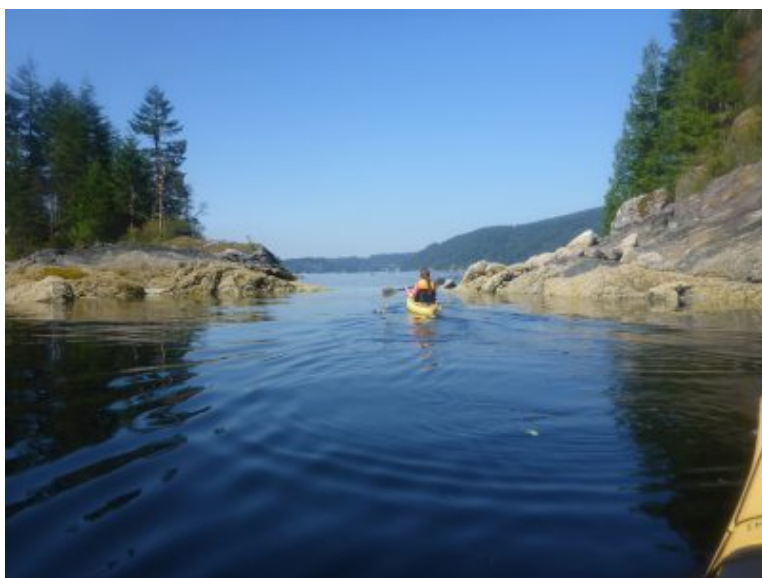


We're back on the water with Tanya first thing, paddling up The Indian Arm in some kayaks. We pass her house that sits right by the water and, like several other waterfront houses, is only accessible by boat as there's no road to it. You get such a different perspective of a place from down on the water compared to on the road. It's still and peaceful and using the arms gives our legs a much needed break. At one point a seal pops it's head up for a quick look then disappears leaving

barely a ripple.



Out in kayaks on the Indian Arm



Through the narrows



Taking a break from the paddling

The North Shore has something of a reputation amongst the mountain bike fraternity as being one of the finest locations in the world for the sport. Woven deep in the woods are a tangled web of trails that have been built up since the earliest days that people decided to try riding off road. Ranging from muddy, rocky single track to skinny planks perched several metres up in the air this is somewhere that anyone with a passing interest in mountain biking can lose several hours, and potentially several limbs. Tanya's husband Dave has found a bike for me to use and I join him and his friend Chris for a brilliant evening bouncing along the trails. I quickly discover that my mountain biking skills have been dormant for too long to really be able to tackle this at the speed the bike deserves. Maybe if I come back tomorrow and practice some more. And the next day...



It's a rule that at least one person should be riding a Cove out on the North Shore



Speeding through the woods



Mountain bikers

A boat ride back to Dave and Tanya's house for a BBQ brings the day to a very pleasant close. As we look across the water the lure of Vancouver and Deep Cove in particular is very strong. As if to tempt us further the next door house, also with no road access, is for sale and it looks like a tempting prospect. Kayaking to work, mountain biking in the summer, skiing in the winter. sounds idyllic, until we discover the

price. And this is the dilemma with Vancouver, its popularity and foreign investors have driven property prices sky high so as well as being one of the best places to live it's also one of the most expensive in North America. Looks like we'll be keeping our house in Bristol a bit longer after all.



Park sign in Deep Cove



Water access only

Despite wanting to take up permanent residency in Kirsten's basement we have to say goodbye the next day. The road out of Deep Cove gives us views to downtown Vancouver as it rollercoasters up and down along the north shore. There's a bike lane but it's narrow and the road itself is very busy until we get to Marine Drive where we follow the water's edge more closely and the bulk of the traffic is left to occupy the main highway. We pass through Gleneagles, namesake to the road where we live in Bristol, then we arrive at Horseshoe Bay where ferries run across to Vancouver Island. Until 10pm the previous evening this was our intended destination but instead we zoom straight past it and continue north. Over a burger and a bottle of wine Tanya and Kirsten persuaded us that we really must ride up to Whistler as the road up there is one of the most scenic drives in the world. Being in a suggestible frame of mind we decided to take their advice and now find ourselves on route 99, the Sea to Sky highway.



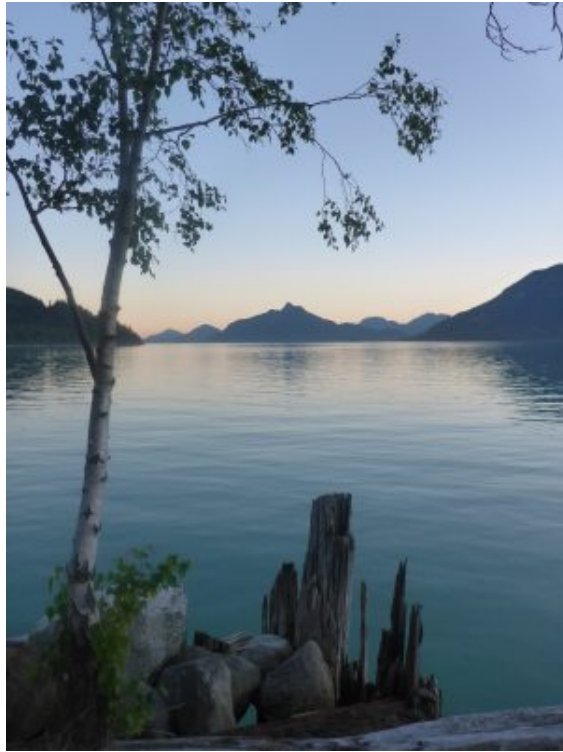
Route 99

As the name suggests the landscape is a breath-taking panorama

from the Howe Sound up to the tops of the huge mountains and blue sky beyond. I can see why drivers would be enjoying themselves. For cyclists it isn't quite such a breeze though. The road was widened to accommodate the extra traffic for the winter Olympics in 2010 but the hard shoulder is a bit too narrow for my liking, not helped by the rumble strip that occupies a good third of it. We spend most of the afternoon going up and down round headlands too. Still, the views are lovely and we reward ourselves with an ice cream at Lions Bay before eventually setting up the tent behind a marina at Britannia Beach.



The Sea to Sky Highway



View from Britannia Beach

At Squamish we leave the coast and start to make progress up into the mountains. The climbing is steep in places and then we're dropped down to have to climb up again. Usually a descent is a good thing but when you know you need to be getting higher it feels like taking two steps forward and one step back. The altitude we've earned is cruelly snatched away and then has to be worked for all over again.

There are various water features to use as an excuse for a break along the way including Shannon Falls, Alice Lake and Brandywine Creek. The last of which provides a much needed bottle top up opportunity as the 38 degree heat is making this a thirsty business.



Shannon Falls

We're glad to get to Whistler Village by late afternoon and refuel on birthday cake flavoured ice cream and Poutine cheesy chips. The exercise to calorie ratio being brought rapidly back into balance. We soon discover that the Wanderlust festival is in full swing, a celebration of all things yoga and alternative. The punters for this make for a stark contrast from the usual set of downhill mountain bikers that hang around Whistler in the summer. Half the people are walking around in coloured tights with foam mats under their arms while the other half are in body armour with full face helmets under their arms.



Arriving in Whistler



Extreme Yoga-ists and Zen Mountain Bikers

We emerge from our covert campsite in the woods in the morning to be greeted by the sight of 50 people in the downward dog position. Back in the village we board a cable car that whisks up to the top of Whistler mountain. The famous bike park is a bit too extreme for the tandem so we're venturing out on foot and hike around the peak on the 'High Note Trail'. All around us are the Coastal mountains with bright green glacial lakes sitting amongst the endless pine forests. We pick our way along the rugged path and over pink tinged 'watermelon' snow before catching the Peak to Peak cable car to neighbouring Blackcombe mountain. Laying claim to being the highest cable

car in the world as well as the longest single span, we can add it to our list of world beating cable cars that we've ridden.



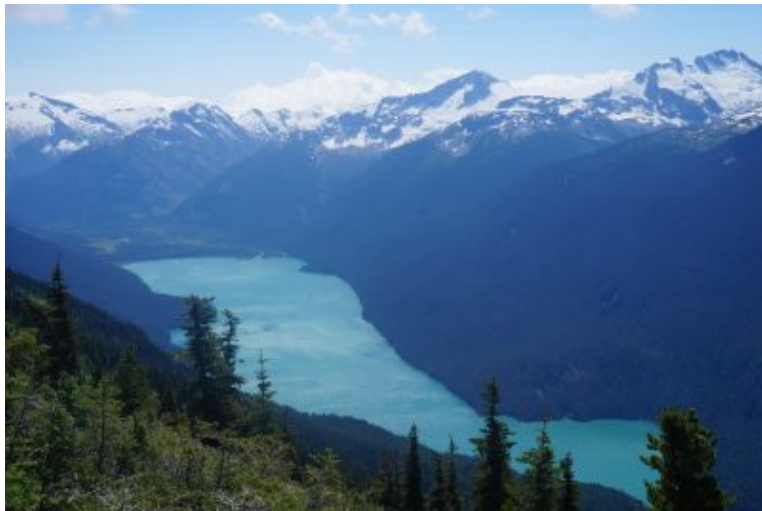
Toes to the sky



Bike school for the brave



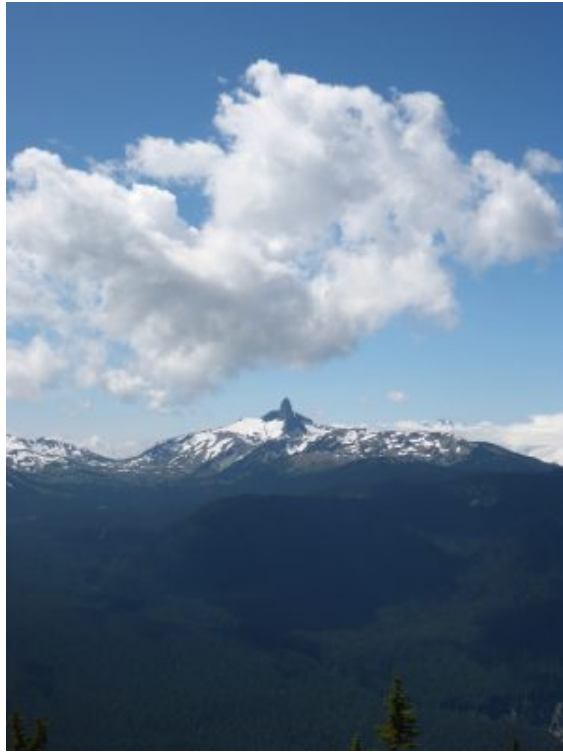
On the High Note trail



Cheakamus Lake



High Note Trail



More mountain views from
The High Note Trail



Lunch at Altitude



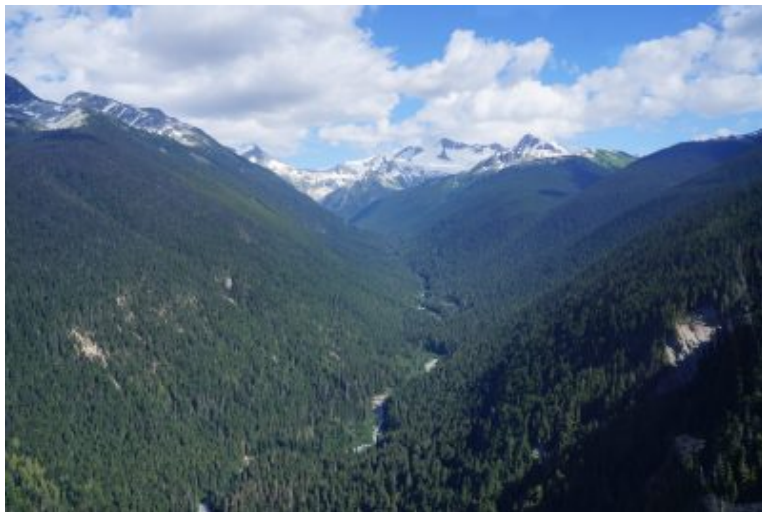
Alpine meadow



Are we lost?



Peak to Peak cable car



View from the Peak to Peak



2nd place is first loser

On our way back down to the village our chairlift passes over a ski piste and busy foraging in the grass is a black bear. Luckily he seems oblivious to the juicy snacks that are passing overhead like sushi on a conveyor belt. Finally we get the bear sighting we've been looking out for since Hokkaido and luckily from a safe vantage point.





Bear!

The musical element of the festival includes a free concert from Jose Gonzalez which comes as a nice surprise in the evening and The Carnival Band keep the party going afterwards. Whistler knows how to lay on a good show both in the winter and the summer.



Nodding to the tunes of Jose Gonzalez



Olympic Standard Party

Although the road back to Horesehoe Bay is effectively downhill we know that it's got nearly as many ups as downs. In the interest of saving time and on the basis that this has been a side trip away from our intended route we take the executive decision to catch the bus back to the Bay. Any time saving is quickly eroded however when we discover that we've left our kindles on the bus shortly after it's sped away. As I may have mentioned before, Kirsty is a voracious reader so to lose her Kindle would be like losing a limb. A phone call to Greyhound and a three hour round trip back into Vancouver and I'm back at the ferry terminal with the trusty Kindles and we can get on board the boat for Vancouver Island.

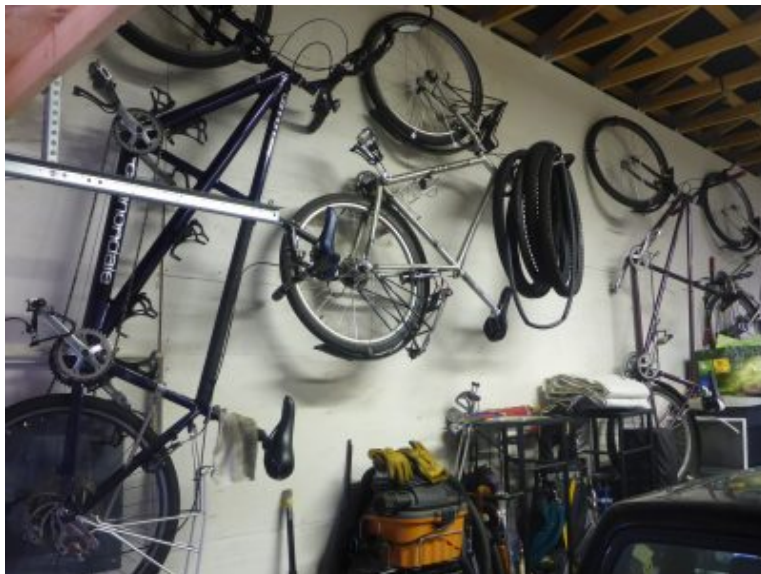


Buses with bike racks

From Nanaimo we ride out into farmland to our next Warmshowers hosts, Cory and Jim. This forms another connection with Tara as by chance we discover that they were her first ever hosts on her first cycle tour. More often than not the people we stay with live at the top of a hill and Cory and Jim's house is no exception. Inside there are pictures and souvenirs from all corners of the globe collected during a 10 year trip where they used all forms of transport, including bikes, to explore far flung places. In a bid to encourage their sons to get into cycling they've bought some tandems and are one of the few people to out do our own collection as they have three tandems hanging in their barn.



Cory and Jim, our hosts
near Nanaimo



Two of their three tandems

We're given some handy tips for the next day's riding. There's a brief spell on the Trans Canada highway where if we'd turned right we could have followed it all the way to Toronto. Instead we hang a left then turn off through Ladysmith and down to Crofton Harbour to take a ferry to Vesuvius on Saltpring Island. This little village has little to do with

it's volcanic name sake, and on the other side of the island Ganges doesn't seem to have much of a Hindu presence but the island itself is a lovely little spot. It's become a popular place for communities of artists to come and find inspiration and like minded friends so the overall feel is very laidback. We lie back on a beach and enjoy views over to the alpenglow on Mount Baker while sea planes and geese take to the evening skies. There are supposed to be orcas under the water too but unfortunately none come to the surface for us.



Mural in Chemainus



Even the Subway gets a mural in Chemainus



Beddis Beach, Salt Spring Island



Camping at Beddis Beach, Salt Spring Island



Riding on Salt Spring Island

We return to the main island after a thorough soaking from a rain shower in the morning with the ferry dropping us off in another familiar sounding town. From Sidney we pick up the Lochside bicycle trail that makes use of an old railway line and allows us to ride straight into Victoria away from any traffic. An intended coffee stop with an ex-colleague of Kirsty's becomes a generous invitation to stay the night despite their having several house guests already. The desire to move to Canada was so great for Ben and Tiffany that they took the gamble of selling their home in the UK and moving over here 7 years ago despite not having jobs secured and with a 6 month old daughter in tow. The gamble paid off though and they managed to find work and they're now enjoying living out their Canadian dream.



Lochside Rail Trail,
Vancouver Island



Ben and his mum, Moira



A tandem loving graffiti artist in Victoria

Unfortunately our Canadian adventure is rapidly coming to an end. It feels like we've sampled a few choice morsels from a feast that could last decades. On our last day we ride into Victoria and take a look in the Royal British Columbia Museum to learn a bit about the First Nations that occupied this land long before Europeans came and took over. It's a sad story of exploitation that will no doubt be repeated once we head south into the USA.



First nation totem poles in

the Royal BC Museum,
Victoria



Learning some first nation language
(or not)



Perfectly preserved 40,000 year old
baby mammoth n the Royal BC Museum

The middle of Victoria feels strangely familiar with the architecture taking on a very British appearance. In fact the harbour area could well be mistaken for Bristol if it weren't for the sea planes taxiing in and out.



Victoria Harbour



Parliament Building and BC flag,
Victoria

We spend our last night in Canada camped overlooking the Puget Sound with the mountains of the Olympic Park in Washington State rising up in the distance. We'll be catching a very early ferry across to get a closer look in the morning and can only hope that getting into this next country will go a little smoother. Onwards to the United States of America!



These were the only orcas
we managed to spot while on
the island



Ferry to The States