

## The Paddler's Inn

### A BC Coastal Wilderness Paradise

Previously published on [Rancho Vignola](#)

We know many of our customers have interesting and diverse businesses and it's always fun for us when we get to visit some of you in person and find out more about you! Our customers, Bruce and Josée McMorran, originally based on Cortes Island, have been selling Rancho Vignola products for quite a few years. In addition, they operate a seasonal resort in a remote corner of the BC coast — The Paddler's Inn (formerly Buffer Zone Resort) — offering wilderness immersion and guided kayaking tours. Having come to know each other a little over the years of doing business (especially Josée and Richard with their shared French Canadian background) and after much encouragement from Bruce and Josée, last July we decided to make The Paddler's Inn our destination for a family vacation.

Our family group of ten gathered in Port McNeill on northern Vancouver Island for the rendezvous at the dock with Bruce and his water taxi. As we unloaded our vehicles and piled up the huge amount of baggage that 10 individuals can manage to amass, I had a slight feeling of anxiety that Bruce would frown upon our "mountain." But when he pulled up to the dock, Bruce was totally unfazed by the load and, with the welcome words, "You can never have too much stuff!," began cheerfully and expertly loading everything onto the boat.

Our two-hour journey deep into the Broughton Archipelago saw us skimming over waves, with the salty breeze moistening our skin and putting smiles on all our faces. Located in Simoom Sound, BC, The Paddler's Inn is a rustic oceanside wilderness resort, roughly 1 km from Echo Bay Resort and Provincial Marine Park. The accommodations may be called rustic but they are extremely comfortable and spotlessly clean, with quality bedding and towels provided, hot showers available and even a flushable, albeit outside, toilet!

Bruce originally arrived at the site more than 25 years ago by kayak, in search of whales and ocean adventures. After squatting for many years, Bruce, with much persistence, managed to persuade the provincial government to allow him a small tenure and right of occupation. A man of many talents, Bruce is not only a guide for kayaking and eco-tourism but is experienced in silviculture, certified as ship's master and is also a licenced massage therapist who practised at the well-known Hollyhock Retreat Centre on Cortes Island.

Josée, a world traveller, was in between stints of tree-planting when fate brought her to BC and to her destiny with Bruce. Until he met Josée, Bruce thought he might never find the right mate to share his love of a life in the wilderness — but Josée enthusiastically took it all on and more, becoming an accomplished herbalist and raising their daughter Indra and son Solomon far from the trappings of society. When she's not in the kitchen creating wonderful meals for her guests, Josée also takes part in guiding groups from the base camp. Luckily for us, Josée hired a colleague, Shea Kotilla, to prepare all the meals during our stay, so that she could be part of our daily adventures.

Before setting out on the first of our many kayaking trips, Bruce led a mini workshop covering every aspect of kayaking. Most of us had kayaked before but we were all extremely grateful for the instruction and felt we were in very capable hands. The thrill of setting off was surpassed

only by the magnificence of the sights, sounds and smells all around us. We were followed by seals, "waved at" by a local resident humpback whale and her calf, and saw bears foraging at the water's edge. Other highlights included a big salmon one of our group was proud to have caught early one morning, greatly assisted by 13-year-old Solomon's fishing expertise. And did I mention the massages? Bruce, our burly "captain," guide and expert in all things wilderness, packed his massage table onto the water taxi during one of our outings and Richard and I each had the pleasure of a massage by Bruce's capable and caring hands, caressed by the soft breeze wafting through the forest and the sound of ocean waves lapping nearby. "Ecstasy" doesn't begin to describe it accurately!

Each morning we would pack a lunch from the bounteous spread laid out in the dining room, supplemented by Josée's supply of Rancho nuts, dried fruit and chocolate treats. Arriving back at home base late afternoon, we would be greeted by Shea with a large tray of appetizers to tide us over until suppertime. While dinner was being prepared, we'd sit on the dock gazing out at the beautiful scenery surrounding us, sometimes playing music and singing, or listening to stories from Indra, Josée and Bruce's confident and mature 15-year-old daughter. Meals were delicious; healthy, fresh and abundant. With red and white wine flowing, and with the conversational talents of the many French Canadians in our group, evenings passed in loud laughter, storytelling and jokes.

The last day, all 15 of us, plus Josée's pet Dachshunds, packed into the water taxi for the journey back to Port McNeill. Constantly on the alert for the famed killer whales which frequent the Broughton Archipelago, we had more or less resigned ourselves to accepting that a sighting was not to be, when one of our group silently pointed to an area roughly 200 metres away. Sure enough, off in the distance we could see the dorsal fins of a pod of Orcas. I excitedly yelled to Bruce, trying to remember the correct nautical term for the direction to look (in this case, "3 o'clock"). Bruce immediately turned the engine off and brought the boat to a complete stop. Grabbing our cameras, we all vied for the best viewing position, silently waiting to see if they would resurface closer. For a few moments, it seemed we were to be disappointed when the pod majestically appeared right in front of our boat, as close as two metres away, so close we could feel the spray from their blow holes and hear their laborious breathing. A family pod of approximately twelve Orcas, from little to huge, graced us with their magnificent presence — we felt truly blessed! It was the perfect ending to a wonderful vacation.

Our five days at The Paddler's Inn passed all too quickly but the memories of our stay will last forever. We feel our families have now forged a bond extending beyond our business relationship and we will definitely be back to visit the McMorran family! Check out The Paddler's Inn website (<http://www.paddlersinn.ca/>) and start planning your own wilderness adventure soon!

~ Sue Vignola