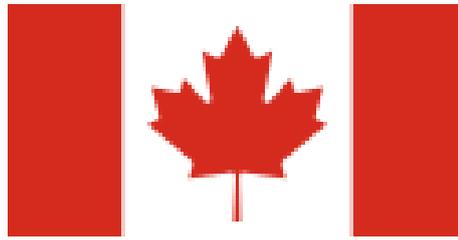


USA / Canada -

My Travel Diary

4 -31 August 2016



“The wonderful things in life are the things you do, not the things you have”

*Reinhold Messner's Motto*

THU 4.8.

From Praha to London (13.35 – 14.50)

From London to Vancouver (17.15 – 18.45) by Airbus 380, a giant plane with 2 decks.

Arrival to Vancouver at 19.20 local time (FRI at 04.20 CET- our time; time difference 9 hours).

At the airport we were awaited by Paul, alpine-plant collector and a pen-friend of Vlastik Pilous (VP), my travelling partner. Our car - Toyota SIENNA V6 (number plate L 66601) was reserved for us at the airport rental office; driving behind Paul to his house for about 30km.

Going to bed at 23.30 local time (8.30 hours CET). Waking up at about 3 a.m.; back to sleep at 4 a.m.; sleeping to 6 a.m. My sleeping room was in the basement, a large comfortable room, where the cat Louise had its cosy place, and where Paul and his wife had their TV and audio room (there was no TV in their living room). Louise was a big and good looking cat that did not like my looks, nevertheless it tolerated me.

FRI 5.8.

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA**



**Motto:** Splendor sine occasu (Latin)

Splendour without diminishment

**Capitol:** Victoria

**Tree:** Western red cedar

Leaving for Victoria, by a coach at 1.10 p.m. from Vancouver and arriving at 5.30 p.m.; the ferry took 90 minutes. I met Olda (my school friend who immigrated to Canada) at the Victoria bus station. I do not think that I have ever seen a more beautiful city than this – flowers everywhere, little traffic, a lot of green space, countless flower beds (roses in blossom for 12 months a year); lots of cyclists; most of the men walk in shorts, even in the evening.



**Victoria** is the capital city of British Columbia and it is located on the southern tip of

Vancouver Island off Canada's Pacific coast. The city has a population of about 80,017 (with thirteen municipalities informally referred to as a Greater Victoria it would be 344,615). It is the southernmost major city in Western Canada, and is located about 100 kilometres from BC's largest city of Vancouver on the mainland.

Named after Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom and, at the time, British North America, Victoria is one of the oldest cities in the Pacific Northwest, with British settlement beginning in 1843. The city has retained a large number of its historic buildings, in particular its two most famous landmarks, Legislative buildings (finished in 1897 and home of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia) and the Empress hotel (opened in 1908).

Known as the "The Garden City", it is an attractive city and a popular tourism destination with a thriving technology sector that has risen to be its largest revenue-generating private industry. Victoria is in the top twenty of world cities for quality-of-life according to Numbeo (the world's largest database of user contributed data about cities and countries worldwide). It is very popular with boaters with its beautiful and rugged shorelines and beaches. It is also popular with retirees, who come to enjoy the temperate and usually snow-free climate of the area as well as the usually relaxed pace of the city. For the same reason it is popular even with homeless people as the climate is friendly to them.



Wawadit'la, also known as Mungo Martin House, with its totem pole. It was built by Chief Mungo Martin in 1953. Located at Thunderbird Park, in the background is the Royal BC Museum.



Inner Harbour with Empress Hotel on the left. Totem pole (below) is also placed at Inner Harbour. Olda took me for an evening walk along the coast and we ended up in a restaurant where they served us a couple of tasty and juicy beef burgers, which we washed down with local beer. It was a lovely warm evening and a lot to see at the seashore.



### SAT 6.8.

Before Olda had prepared our breakfast we went for a morning walk (about 1-2km) along the coast, which he does regularly every day; it was not a stroll, far from it, more like a real exercise.

After breakfast Olda invited me for a hike with his friend Sandy, a retired school teacher, who regularly takes part in popular walk – races (she came 2<sup>nd</sup> in the last Victoria 10km event; Sandy is also a leader of walking club for seniors). Both she and Olda are well trained walkers, and when I asked Sandy to show me her walking speed during such a race, I could not have believed the speed she moved! So, I was going to join semi-professional walkers, I mean these two people who take walking really seriously.

As most of the trails used nowadays by tourists follow the Indian tracks we were most probably going to do just that. It was later on that I had found out that the Indians who had settled here some 400 years before the arrival of Europeans

were called Esquimalt people (after the region now known as Esquimalt) and referred to as First Nations people.



*Olda and Sandy, getting ready for a hike.*

Our trail was to lead through the original **temperate rainforest** towards the rugged west coast of Vancouver Island.

**Rainforests** are forests characterized by high rainfall, with annual rainfall between 250 and 450 centimetres. There are two types of rainforest: tropical rainforest and temperate rainforest.

Around 40% to 75% of all biotic species are indigenous to the rainforests. It has been estimated that there may be many millions of species of plants, insects and microorganisms still undiscovered in tropical rainforests. Tropical rainforests have been called the "jewels of the Earth" and the "world's largest pharmacy", because over one quarter of natural medicines have been discovered there.<sup>[3]</sup>



Rainforests are also responsible for 28% of

the world's oxygen turnover, sometimes misnamed oxygen production, processing it through photosynthesis from carbon dioxide and consuming it through respiration.

Tropical forests cover a large part of the globe, but **temperate rainforests** only occur in few regions around the world. Temperate rainforests are rainforests in temperate regions. They occur in North America (in the Pacific Northwest in Alaska, **British Columbia**, Washington, Oregon and California), in Europe (parts of the British Isles such as the coastal areas of Ireland and Scotland, southern Norway, parts of the western Balkans along the Adriatic

coast, as well as in Galicia and coastal areas of the eastern Black Sea, including Georgia and coastal Turkey), in East Asia (in southern China, Highlands of Taiwan, much of Japan and



Korea, and on Sakhalin Island and the adjacent Russian Far East coast), in South America (southern Chile) and also in Australia and New Zealand.

*Two pictures from this temperate rainforest. The first photo shows trees overgrown with moss while the second photo shows a huge polyporus on a tree 1.2m in diameter.*



*Rugged coast with small fishing boats (little dots) fishing for salmon; notice bull kelp in shallow waters (close to the land).*

Some of other interesting things I noticed on this walk:

1. Signs of **springboards logging** from the past



*Sandy is overlooking and old tree-stump with signs of springboard logging. These stumps were left in situ, as the saw-mills could not cope with the large conical piece of wood.*

Second photo shows a mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) being felled using springboards, c. 1884–1917, Australia (*Wikipedia*).

2. **Bald eagle** being chased by two crows (the birds flew along that rugged coast seen on page 5)



Bald eagles are not actually bald; the name derives from an older meaning of the word, "white headed". The adult is mainly brown with a white head and tail. The sexes are identical in plumage, but females are about 25 percent larger than males. The beak is large and hooked. The plumage of the immature is brown.

The bald eagle is both the national bird and national animal of the United States of America. The bald eagle appears on its seal. In the late 20th century it was on the brink of extirpation in the contiguous United States.

Populations have since recovered and the species was removed from the U.S. government's list of endangered species on July 12, 1995 and transferred to the list of threatened species. It was removed from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife in the Lower 48 States on June 28, 2007.

3. **Bull kelp** (as seen on page 5) common along the Pacific Coast of North America. The term kelp refers to marine algae.



It forms thick beds on rocks, and is an important part of **kelp forests** (on the right). It can grow to a maximum of 36 m. Blade growth can reach 15 cm per day. Kelp forests are underwater areas with a high density of kelp. They are recognized as one of the most productive and dynamic ecosystems on Earth.

Kelp forests have been important to human existence for thousands of years. Indeed, many now theorise that the first colonisation of the Americas was due to fishing communities following the Pacific kelp forests during the last ice age. One theory contends that the kelp forests that would have stretched from northeast Asia to the American Pacific coast would have provided many benefits to ancient boaters. The kelp forests would have provided many sustenance opportunities, as well as acting as a type of buffer from rough water. Besides these benefits, researchers believe that the kelp forests might have helped early boaters navigate, acting as a type of "kelp highway".

4. **Salal**-oval leaf blueberry (*Gaultheria shallon*); this plant is similar to our blueberries but bigger.

Its dark blue berries and young leaves are both edible and are efficient appetite suppressants, both with a unique flavour. *G. shallon* berries were a significant food resource for native people, who ate them fresh and dried them into cakes. They were also used as a sweetener, and the Haida (an

indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America) used them to thicken salmon eggs. The leaves of the plant were also sometimes used to flavour fish soup. More recently, *G. shallon* berries are used locally in jams, preserves, and pies. They are often combined with Oregon-grape because the tartness of the latter is partially masked by the mild sweetness of *G. Shallon*. Used for thousands of years by First Nations, the primary non-Aboriginal use in Canada in the 20th century has been as a source of florist greenery, because the leaves never wilt and stay green, due to thick waxy surface and more recently as a ground cover in landscaping.



*Gaultheria shallon*

Scientific classification

*Gaultheria shallon* is a leathery-leaved shrub in the heather family (Ericaceae), native to western North America. In English, it is known as **salal**, **shallon**, or simply **gaultheria** in Britain.

On our way back, we noticed some bear's dung on the trail. When I asked Olda what would he do if a bear appeared, he said, stand still and let it move away from our path. I thought to myself I must remember that as within the next few weeks Vlastik and I we'll

surely be going through several bear's territories!



Our trail was situated on the coast, west of Victoria, overlooking Juan De Fuca Strait and the Olympic Mountains in the US.

After that rather stunning 3-4 hour walk we stopped at a roadside restaurant and had enjoyed much needed meal - thick soup, mashed potatoes and roast beef.

Back at Olda's flat: - this was the view from his living room window on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The best motivation to travel, no doubt!



In the evening Olda took me for a drive through the town, stopping at the port and on the shore, where there were many people enjoying the outdoor activities. I also saw some underwater creatures there – these were sea otters. We ended the most amazing day at one of Victoria's restaurant having fish and chips, with a live music entertainment.



Some of the numerous cyclists on Victoria streets, and behind them you can see a chap dressed like a Scotsman playing his bag-pipes. Notice the raised flower bed. Being a cyclist myself, whenever I see other cyclist I always take a note of them. Over here I was amazed to see so many young women

cycling on their own, e.g. there was a very good looking lady cyclist leaving the ferry at the port of Vancouver Island, and on her own. This you would hardly see in Czech Republic or even in Europe.

SUN 7.8.



Power cut in the morning –“very unusual”- said Olda. We had decided to walk along the coast to Victoria for breakfast (about 40-50 min.) What a lovely brisk walk, looking at various interesting buildings, parks and gardens. That path along the coast must be an ideal location for all walkers and runners.

On this walk I once again saw several young sea otters playing in the water, and as this was the



second time, I just had to find out more about these, for me, unusual animals.

Along the North American coast south of Alaska, the sea otter's range is discontinuous. A remnant population survived off Vancouver Island into the 20th century, but it died out despite the 1911 international protection treaty, with the last sea otter taken near Kyuquot in 1929. From 1969 to 1972, 89 sea otters were flown or shipped from Alaska to the west coast of Vancouver Island.

This population expanded to over 3,200 in 2004, and their range on the island's west coast expanded from Cape Scott in the north to Barkley Sound to the south. In 1989, a separate colony was discovered in the central

British Columbia coast. It is not known if this colony, which numbered about 300 animals in 2004, was founded by transplanted otters or by survivors of the fur trade.



The status of the sea otters has improved since 2004 with a report of 4,700 in 2008 that improved their status to "special concern" in Canada. They currently occupy much of the exposed west coast of Vancouver Island and parts of the central mainland BC coast.



*Mother sea otter with rare twin pups. Sea otter twin births are rare, and the high demands on the mother usually result in one pup being abandoned. Sea otters keep kelp forests healthy by eating animals that graze on kelp.*

After a short walk in the streets we came to a restaurant, where, according to Olda, they serve some excellent breakfast. As we were early (before 9 a.m.) there was no need to wait for a seat; we've had scrambled eggs, sausages, toasts, pancakes and a lot of coffee. By the time we had finished our breakfast, there were many other hungry people waiting at the door already.

It took us less than one hour to walk back to Olda's apartment, where I collected my backpack and Olda took me back to the centre of Victoria in his car, to catch a bus to Vancouver. Before he dropped me off, he showed me a bit more of the town, the coast, the parks and walking paths along the coast. We parted and hoped to meet in Krkonose Mountains next month.

When I found myself on my own again, my first steps led to a mountaineering/camping shop, where I was after a gas-cooker, as from tomorrow I was to cook my own meals. The shop was one of the biggest of its sort I have ever seen, and after choosing just the thing I was looking for and went to pay for it, I went into a panic – I could not find my debit card! Remembering the words of the corporal Jones from Dad's Army - "Don't panic"- I calmed down and returned the goods. Will I have enough money to get back to Vancouver? I phoned Olda, just in case I had forgotten my card at his flat (although I knew that would not be the case, as I have never used it during my stay at Victoria). Olda confirmed it-nothing there. Good job I had my return ticket to Vancouver! So, I had to manage with what little cash I had on me.

There was one place I wanted to see - Victoria Museum (since Paul had told me it's much better than the museum at Vancouver), and as my bus was to depart at about 4 p.m., I could spare just over two hours. After paying the entry fee, which included seeing a film in 3D iMAX theatre I was left with about 20 CAD.

### **Victoria Museum**



*Main entrance the Royal British Columbia Museum*



*Thunderbird Park with the museum in the background*



Very soon I realised that two hours would not be enough for seeing everything in the museum! The historical exhibitions included: the Indians, explorers, various ships, forests, miners, trees, numerous flowers and animals, gold prospectors, lumberjacks, farmers and their machinery, and a lot more. But the most memorable experience was 3D iMAX picture, with its

screen about 15 m high and its width of it about 25 m (the biggest in BC). All the visitors picked up their specs and were informed about the exit door and toilets (in case they'd be sick). The film they were showing was about the US National Parks, and what a show that was!



*The popular woolly mammoth in the natural history gallery*



You can see I am not kidding when talking about Victoria city “flower power” – hanging flower baskets at the bus station!

The return ferry was full of Chinese. I bought a chicken soup for 7 CAD and my “pocket money” was reduced to 13 CAD.

I was a bit worried about finding my way from a bus terminal in Vancouver back to Paul’s house in Vancouver suburbs Coquitlam. Luckily Paul, Sharron and Vlastik were returning from their Sunday trip and met me at the bus terminal.



On the way back home we called at a Chinese restaurant and had a huge meal, which we of course could not manage. So, as it’s done over here, the waiter provided polystyrene boxes and we could take the food home. What a weekend! All was well that ended well - I had found my debit card in my basement room at Paul’s. The cat Louise was to blame!