



**Please Join Us  
Van Isle Heritage Club  
Christmas luncheons**

**VICTORIA**

Friday Dec 18  
Four Mile House  
199 Island Hwy

**MID ISLAND**

Friday Dec 11  
Bayside Bistro  
240 Dogwood St  
Parksville

**COURTENAY**

Monday Dec. 14  
White Spot  
private room  
2299 Cliffe Ave

All luncheons start at 11:30 with a time to Mix and Mingle

Lunch served at 12:15 Door prizes and gifts to follow

Please rsvp by Dec 4 .. Return envelope enclosed





Averill Creek Vineyard Tour and Tastings and snack

Enrico Winery - Mill Bay tastings and snack

Damali Lavender and Winery - Cobble Hill

Cowichan Bay Pub Early dinner



We had a fun filled—wine filled day . Two buses—one from Victoria one from Oceanside and 59 people enjoyed a sunny warm day. We visited three wineries and ended the day at Cowichan Bay Pub. We raffled off a bottle of wine from each winery and had a 50/50 draw in total came away with \$495 for our donations to charities. As well we had two people that were unable to attend and generously donated their \$65 to our charities donation.



Cowichan Valley  
Wine Tour Aug 24







## Van Isle Heritage Club

28th Newsletter November 2015

### Included in this issue:

Details on our Three annual December luncheons

Pictures from our last big trip—France Wine regions and Switzerland

Lorraine Cox—detailed account of their Forest Fire experience

Pictures from our Cowichan Valley wine Tour

RSVP and return envelope and information about a Santa Elf afternoon

Request for Volunteer service info

### Message from Jim Sharpe:

Almost the end of 2015 and we have had lots of great times and continued in our commitments to our communities. We will be donating to a number of different charities this year. Food Bank and Children's Literacy and Mental Health — Alzheimer's. This year we also collected Glasses for "The Gift of Sight" and Pennies for Variety Club.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone at our Christmas luncheons this year.

We will have gifts and door prizes 50/50 Draws so bring your loonies.

Just a little reminder to please send us a quick email if you change / up date your email address. We are trying to send out more of our news by email but it is difficult when we have rejected email addresses, THANK YOU

We are always looking for feedback—so if you have any questions or suggestions please do not hesitate to contact us.



### New members

#### Welcome

Glenda Sedgwick—Victoria

Paul Jamison—Victoria

### In memory of our friends and colleagues

*Sadly ..... Peter Taylor passed away in October*

*This is another very personal loss to our Heritage Club as Peter and Sandy have travelled with our group many times. Including our last Cowichan Wine tour. On the bus ride home we were all treated to his songs! He will be missed*



### NANAIMO Coffee Club

Thanks to Frank Higgins

LAST Wednesday of each month  
9am

Windward Pub 1588 Boundary Cres Vicinity of the  
Nanaimo Hospital



### address:

878 Fairways Drive  
Qualicum Beach V9K 2J1  
[heritagevanisle@shaw.ca](mailto:heritagevanisle@shaw.ca)  
250 752-4866

**national website**

**heritageclub.ca**



## Travel blog from Lorraine Cox

The morning of August 13, 2015 began like a typical work day at Kettle River Provincial campground, for Greg and me. My work shift began at 7:00 AM so we were up early and had breakfast. Greg had removed and re-painted one of our dried and cracked decals on the RV the day before, and was anxious to do another. Little did we know that today we would be caught in a wildfire and become the only two park employees responsible for over 200 campers.

After my shift ended at 12:30, we had a coffee as Greg continued with the decal. He had it nearly ready to mask the side of the RV and paint it, and I was going to start getting lunch/dinner prepared. Don, our manager, had been with us having a coffee and we'd been chatting about a few things to do in the park.

As Don was readying to leave, a camper came into the park and stopped him to let him know there was a wildfire near Rock Creek, only 6 kilometres on Hwy 33 south from us. This was just shy of 2:00 PM and Don told Greg he was going to take a drive down the highway to see where it was, and get any information he could. This could be a threatening fire to the campground as the wind was headed in our direction.

Don returned to the park and called Greg to say the fire was about 4 kilometres down the road and we should be prepared for official evacuation notice. We got a few things organized for readying the RV for evacuation, then realized that should we have to evacuate, we would be the last out and therefore, the truck would probably be the only thing going. We tossed the laptop, wallet, purse and important papers into the truck and by this time, about 20 minutes after Don's first call, got another call to say they had fire all around them up in the work yard and that they had to get out. The road down into the park was on fire, the yard around them was on fire, and the only way out for them was Hwy 33 and head north to Beaverdell. They radioed us that they "have to go, the fire is everywhere, you are on your own". Not the words we were hoping to hear, but that is the way it was, so we had to go with it. Our whole rehearsed evacuation plan as discussed in safety meetings just went up in smoke. Literally.

Don and Joanne had so little time, she was able to grab her laptop and a couple of incidentals near the door of the RV before she took off out of the park to Hwy 33 north in their van and Don drove out saving one work truck. Leslie and Terry, who lived in their motor home in the work yard about 75 yards from Don & Joanne and also work in the campground, were able to get both their car and motor home out. Leslie drove their car and Terry fired up the motor home and drove off with his sewer hose, electric and the satellite dish flopping along behind them. Three work trucks and the "mule" (like a quad/golf cart) burned in the yard so hot the aluminum heads and rims were a melted pile underneath.

From our site down in the campground, we could see fireballs in the sky - the trees were so dry that when the sap heated up, it exploded the trees. The hot embers from these exploding trees is what caused the fires surrounding the work yard and Don's and Joanne's RV as well as the office building. The wind carried some of these embers clear across the campground, thank goodness, to the far shore of the Kettle River, igniting a new fire over there. People floating the river had embers landing on their floaties and deflating them. When we saw this firestorm, and it was obvious the fire was so close to the campground area, we realized we were stuck here and there was no getting out with even the truck. Once we'd heard from Don & Joanne that the road was on fire, it didn't really matter where the important stuff was - if the fire got to us, it would all be going up.

At the first sign of smoke, some campers had been coming to us in the Host site to say they were on their way out. Early leavers were just in time, but then when some tried to go out, they realized the road was on fire near the top and they had to return to the campground. Upsetting as this was, it calmed everyone in some respects, as from that point the speeding chaos that had been occurring was brought to a standstill. People now were listening to and asking for our direction, and pooling together to look after each other.

We have safety meetings once a month and evacuation for fire is one of the topics. This was advantageous, as we didn't have to think about what to do since we'd discussed this during meetings. The issue we had was that four of the employees had been cut off by the fire and had to evacuate immediately. The only thing left that went according to plan, was to marshal everyone in or around the big field near the playground and determine if exit via the KVR (Kettle Valley Rail - an old decommissioned rail bed, now a trail utilized by hikers and cyclists from all over the world) to Rock Creek was safe. Our evacuation procedure is in stages. If it is low risk, we can send campers out of the park in an orderly fashion with evacuation alert notice. High risk as we were now experiencing, is to be handled by emergency personnel such as RCMP. They direct us, we direct the campers. But we had not received any evacuation order. Everything happened so fast, no-one was prepared nor capable of doing anything except what needed tending to immediately at hand. Knowing that embers had crossed the Kettle River to the North, our concern was that there might be a fire across the KVR bridge to the SE of us, and that access along the "back road" would not be possible to Rock Creek. If this was the case, our only options were for helicopter evacuation from our marshaling point in the big field or head for the river where there is a huge deep water hole which would be the safest cover if necessary. Helicopter evacuation was not a promising option as the fire, now a firestorm, had created huge winds and the smoke made visibility minimal. So now, we had to be assured the trail from the KVR bridge was a safe exit.

We were fortunate to have several firemen camping, and they came to get the one piss can and shovel we keep near the host site (the others are in each work truck, which were all in the work yard at this time) and some 5 gallon buckets and then attempted to keep the fire on the "top" side of the KVR trail and out of the campsite near us and a majority of RVs and vehicles. A retired paramedic, Pat, and an RCMP officer also camping, along with Greg, set off to make sure all campsites were clear of people. Another fellow with a bicycle did a sweep of campsites. Some campers were totally unaware of any problem, and were sent to the marshaling area. One fellow, upset with me for not unlocking the gate to the KVR had headed toward the bridge with some of his camping party. (Unlocking the gate was redundant as there are huge boulders along the KVR to prevent vehicles from trespassing.) This fellow knew a someone of importance, with whom he made cell phone contact, and was able to verify that there were no hazardous fires between us and Rock Creek along the back road. RCMP then arranged evacuation from just past the KVR bridge.

While Greg and the helpers did some running around alerting campers, I stayed stationary at the marshaling area to keep everyone informed. Greg and I had our walkie talkies for constant contact. As well, we kept in constant cell phone contact with Don to keep him up on what was happening and for any advise. Once we knew there was evacuation taking place, we sent everyone to the KVR bridge. RCMP and some highway contractor pickups were there to take everyone to Rock Creek, where a marshaling point was set up and a school bus was made available to take 5 bus loads of campers, including us, to Midway where the Red Cross and ESS were setting up for us all at the Community Centre.

From the 2:00 PM beginning until the approximate 5:00 PM when Greg and I were the last two people to cross the KVR bridge and be evacuated, things just happened. There was no time to dwell on what "might" happen. Initially, we were preparing to evacuate, RV and all. Then we thought we'd get out with the truck, and then we realized we could concentrate only on getting people out. This is a frightening thought, and more especially so since we knew we were the only two staff left in the park. However, the men who came to help first identified themselves in their professions, and took on a responsibility familiar to them. Do something and keep in contact. We had but two upset women, who were very frightened and needed calming, and a few frightened children. Everyone else pulled together, passed on information, looked out for others and awaited instruction. Things couldn't have gone more smoothly, given the circumstances

For me, initially I was worried we'd lose everything. Then I thought if we could get out with the truck, that would be OK. Then it was obvious that we were there, there was no getting out with possessions, and we had 200 plus people depending on only us. With Don and Joanne and Terry and Leslie having to escape from the top end, we had to focus and do everything we could. It's amazing how calm one can be in a crisis such as this. Yes, the smoke was thick. The air was super hot and dry - I raced back to the 5th wheel and grabbed all our water bottles from the fridge as we were being dehydrated from the heat. Flames could be seen and the fire was obviously encroaching. The wind it created for itself was sending it parallel to Highway 33, which was good for us, as it wasn't heading our way, but along the KVR. It did cause great concern for campers at the back of the campground, as it was obvious that area was going to burn, and it did. The sound was what got us. It was like three freight trains thundering by - it was deafening. The air was vibrating. I do not ever want to experience that again. You cannot concentrate on these things though, you have to let it be and focus. To let your mind wander, is to allow panic and unclear thinking. When we could see flames from our Host site only 150 feet away, you still have to focus. We still weren't sure the "back road" was safe.

We evacuated from Kettle River to SunOka, a day use park between Penticton and Summerland, BC. Don and Joanne live here on site in their RV all winter as watchmen, so once they get their new RV and insurance is settled, they will move it onto the RV pad here. We are parked at the edge of the parking lot where we can hook up to power and water and use a garden hose to drain the grey tanks. We'll have to do a black tank run soon, and hopefully we will have some direction on Tuesday, August 25th, whether our employer has further need for us, or whether we can spend September with our family.

We got half way to Rock Creek when I realized we had no wallet, no purse, no important papers, no laptop. Nothing. Everything we owned was in the campground and it wasn't looking good when we left. But, over 200 people and all the dogs and a couple of cats were safe. Later in the evening, an ESS person told us there were eight firefighters in the campground doing everything they could to save all assets. There was some comfort knowing that the majority of these "assets" were near us in a concentrated location, making this job easier for them. However, they amazed everyone by saving all but one tent! Some campsites were completely surrounded by black remains of fire, but the RV, or whatever other contents that were on site, were safe. Heroes isn't a good enough word. The only loss were the assets in the work yard: the office, the managers RV, three work trucks, the "mule", a giant woodpile, tool sheds and some other equipment, as well as three private vehicles which had been parked along Highway 33.

Once everyone arrived in Midway, the townsfolk had come together and made a bad experience good. They had sandwiches, pizza, fruit, coffee, tea, water, kids toys, blankets, toothbrushes and toothpaste. And cell phone chargers were plugged into every socket in the building. Everyone's cell phones were dying and everyone needed a charge. Locals were offering bedrooms in their homes or in their RVs and some campers were being taken to bed and breakfast or motels in Midway or Grand Forks. Greg & I waited as most everyone got settled in someplace, and then Pat came in offering beds for two more couples in her home. She and her husband Fred put up four couples that night, and had coffee and cookies for us in the morning. We all headed for the Community Centre where breakfast was being served at 8:00 AM and an RCMP information meeting took place at 10:00 AM. The people of Midway, as well as Greenwood and Grand Forks, went above and beyond to provide for not just the displaced campers, but the evacuees from Rock Creek itself. We cannot thank them enough!

By now we'd had word that Dayton and Jody-Lynn and our grandchildren were on their way to us from Rossland, bringing their travel trailer so we could all be together. That is the point where I broke. It was so good to know I would have some family to hug soon. Brittany and Chris could not get to us because Hwy 3 and 33 were both closed.

On Sunday, the 16th, the RCMP asked us to go back to the park and help however we could with them to get people in and get their RVs and vehicles out of the park. We were able to stay in the campground for that night and the next, before we had word a new fire had started and we had to evacuate. Our managers, Don and Joanne arrived on Sunday and stayed with us in our RV.

It was a wonderful thing to walk into the campground from the back road we'd evacuated from, and see our RV and truck, as well as all the other RVs and vehicles still there. In one piece, and not burned. Seeing parts of the campground, on the other hand, was not so wonderful. Although 70 of the 114 sites are fully functional, the areas that got burned are so devastating. The fire was so hot up near the work yard where our managers had lived, that even the ground was burned up, leaving nothing but a moonscape with black sticks poking up. The wait now is for BC Parks to approve safety in the park, get power restored so that the water can be restored and depending on the length of time this takes, see if the park will reopen for the remainder of the season.

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We would like to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the love and support by phone and presence Dayton & Jody-Lynn and Brittany & Chris, for the use of a Motorhome if need be Paul & Patti-Lee Tyrrell, and the offer of the use of a pickup if need be Brendan Prough, whom we have only met once, and for the offer of financial support Barry Greenwood. Thank you everyone else for the messages, FB posts, phone calls, texts and the prayers. Being thought of while emotions are running rampant means a lot. Humongous thank yous to the campers within the park who pitched in to assist Greg & I with communication and evacuation of the campground, the community of Midway as well as Greenwood and Grand Forks for looking after every need of the evacuees, the RCMP from Midway and area, the firefighters, our heroes, who gave it all they had to save everything they possibly could, to the others who had a hand in evacuation and transportation, and to our employers, Michael and Bonny Ley, who have looked after us so well during employment and throughout this ordeal. To the folks we met from the campground while marshaled in Midway, you are no longer just a site number even if that is how we have to remember you all!

We hope to see everyone on August 13, 2016 at Kettle River!

***Thanks to Lorraine Cox for such a personal account***

***of this first hand forest fire experience***