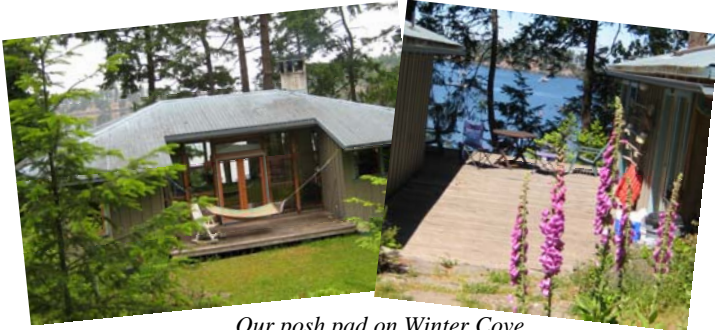




# Wanna go? O, Canada!

Just so you know: while you were recently melting away at 114°, I was trying to get warm, in front of a fireplace in a cottage on a cove on a fairytale island with ferns and lush green forests with two deer in the yard...life used to be so hard...



Our posh pad on Winter Cove

We found ourselves at this wonderful waterfront hideaway on Saturna Island - cedar beams, fireplace, vintage doors and windows, outside shower and sauna, and no locks - courtesy of Homelink, the home exchange service that we have used many times. We've always met great people and had super experiences with exchanges, and this was no different - simply wonderful...again.

**GULF ISLANDS** Anchored in the Strait of Georgia between mainland British Columbia and Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands are western Canada's Riviera, with much better weather than the mainland. A Gulf Islands tourism website proclaims *"Made up of over a dozen large islands, the Gulf Islands is interspersed with a multitude of islets too numerous to count. This special west coast Gulf Island paradise of Canada is a small taste of the Mediterranean, blended with a unique Canadian flavour."*

The Salish Indians occupied the area and lived quite a rich and lush life before the arrival of European explorers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Immigrants of all types later poured into the area, including native Hawaiians hired by the Hudson Bay Co. Many "Kanaka" men married First Nations women, and their descendants can still be found in the area. The border between the Canadian islands and the USA was finally established in 1859 after something called the Pig War. Seriously.



**SATURNA ISLAND** itself is a different planet...*"an artisan lifestyle"*...a throwback to the sixties, full of aging hippies, radical Greenies and the occasional reasonable person. These people have somehow survived peace, love and saturnalia (bacchanalia's cousin), and seem to have found their place in the fog. It's a tie-dye and Birkenstock 'tude here...the bakery store is unattended, for *cryin' out loud* - you just put your money in the till! And there's a "free store" - no money.

In fact, there's lots of nothing here: no infrastructure, no law enforcement, and no garbage service, which makes for an aggressive (draconian) recycling regime...a kind of Green Stepford stuck in reverse. Or maybe overdrive.



The recycling police

We "get" the Green thing, although we're not rabid about it; still, we were shocked when we had to rinse our plastic beer cups before putting them in the correct recycling bin—one of five.

In addition to the recycling center, there is, it must be confessed, one gas pump, one winery, one small lodging establishment, 1½ "real" stores, several B&Bs, and about 300 permanent residents. ..and they like it that way, *thank-you-very-much!*



Madrona trees

**LIFE FORMS** Saturna is thickly green in another way—heavily forested with conifers, including cedar, and also the ravishing Arbutus (or "madrona"), Canada's only broadleaved evergreen tree. Distributed freely about like weeds, it has reddish-brown bark that peels off, leaving the trunk of the tree smooth to the touch. We were reminded greatly of our own Manzanita. An indigenous lavender is gently ubiquitous, as are armies of ferns in shady spots.

The fauna that gets noticed around here is primarily sea mammals: whales, porpoises, seals, otters and such. We were told about garter snakes, which we did see, but we also stumbled onto some small, odd sea snakes. Deer were everywhere, and we saw a rabbit once, but no evidence of any other land mammals; surely there must be raccoons and skunks and stuff? The forest, in fact, is odd due to the absence of squirrels and chipmunks. Our cove was full of geese, and an occasional heron; robins, raucous crows, and wee hummingbirds flew all around the cottage. My favorite animals, though, were the bald eagles, resplendent and forebodingly ever-present along the shore.



Water snake

The aforementioned Human life here consists of socialists and fugitives, on the run or on the dole, and a skosh of summer student workers, boaters, and mainlanders with holiday homes. *Not that there's anything wrong with that*—it all comes together quite charmingly in the end. Even so, there's a classic insider/outsider vibe going on here that we didn't quite surmount, not that we tried real hard...we were on vacation, after all!

**ISLAND FUN** Whew...now that we've got all that record-keeping out of the way, we can get to the really good stuff...



East Point

**HIKING** Our hosts (the homeowners) John and Val met us at the ferry dock and after giving us an orientation to the house, took us on a hike on a trail along the highest peak of the island, from which we could see all of the southern Canadian gulf islands and also the San Juans just across Boundary Pass in the US. They live in Vancouver, and spent

that night at a friend's on-island, returning home the next day after we all went on a picnic and walk around the southeast tip of the island, one of many picnic-hikes we would do in our 10 days there.

**FOOD/WINE** - The winery here makes a friendly Pinot Gris, a thankfully un-oaked Chardonnay, and a very drinkable Pinot Noir from their own grapes, but the food was too-too foo-foo for us simpletons. The Pub at the dock had great beer batter fish'n chips, an honest cheeseburger and a west view to forever. The eatery at the General Store was reputed to have excellent fare, but we never ate there because of that insider/outsider thing. The store itself had few fresh meats, but the caramelized salmon bits were so good you had to be there when they set the new box out or you wouldn't get any. We figured the Saturnines spent their waking hours in pursuits other than making money, so there's not much demand for fancy stuff, and we just made do...and we were keeping our weight down, too...until the boats came!

**BOATING** Yes, we do have other friends than the ones you already know about, and we had made arrangements to hook up in Winter Cove with Doug and Angie, our FWBs (Friends with Boats) from Alberta. We hadn't really known where our house would be, nor where they would be anchoring, but in the all-time most blatant of Cosmic Confluences, Doug's friend Tony owns a mooring just offshore...amazing that we traveled from Arizona and they traveled from Edmonton to meet a mere 3-iron away.



Our friends' boats, just off our deck

Tony's friend Mike had come along, with his family and some fresh Dungeness crab he had caught on the way over. They had both set prawn traps out along the island, and one morning, Doug and I accompanied them to check their traps. We all survived, and while to them it was a disappointing catch, we spent two nights feasting on prawns, shrimp and crab.

Prawn fest



Another morning the guys went fishing and returned with several large ling cod, which added to our shellfish orgy the second night.

One afternoon we took 2 boats, 12 people, 1 dog, 2 ice chests, a barbecue and 2 umbrellas about twenty minutes away to picnic on Cabbage Island, a beautiful island in the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve.



Picnic on Cabbage Island



**OVER BUDGET** is great -- the Carver 450 motor yacht, I mean -- and we took off with Doug and Angie at 12gph (twin Cummins 450s!) on the proverbial 3 hour cruise... We didn't get marooned, instead overnighting at the marina in Ganges, a really charming little harbor town on Salt Spring, the biggest and most populated island in the Gulfs, and had just about as much fun as you can have in 45 feet over 24 hours!



Me'n the RCMP!

**CANADA DAY**

Saturna Island has a *waaay*-famous Canada Day (July 1) celebration, and it was no coincidence that we were there for that. Canadians come from all over for the festival, many by boat, and our cove was full of 'em the day before. People start showing up at around noon, with games for the kids, beer for the adults, handicrafts booths, and hamburgers, hotdogs and ice cream. We heard *O, Canada* for the first time, got to stand next to a real live Mountie, and of course, partake in the ...

**...LAMB BARBECUE!** A tradition since 1950, this was the centerpiece of the fair. A couple dozen lambs are butterflied and set on racks encircling a huge fire, set at 4am. At about 2pm, the first hundred tickets are called, continuing until about 1,000 have been served...delicious!



Lamb barbecue

For a slice of Cadiana, there's nothing like it, and it was a fitting end to our super Saturna sojourn. If you like *great* people (yes, Canadians!), breathtaking nature, beautiful water, boats and seafood—the good life, *eh?*—ya gotta visit the Gulf Islands.

Wanna go?

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