

Earning Canadian camping stripes, the easy way

The News' Alan Campbell learns what it takes to be a Canuck — but takes the path of least resistance

You can recognize a slapshot from a wristshot and you can drink maple syrup by the gallon.

But you're not really Canadian until you've been camping.

So, having lived here for almost four years and still not spent quality family time in the great outdoors, it was long past due to right that wrong.

With that in mind, a sparkling 24-foot recreational vehicle (RV) was booked at Westcoast Mountain Campers in Richmond — OK, it's not really camping, I know, but Rome was not built in a day.

But coming from the U.K., where long road trips are not at all common, I didn't fancy a marathon seven-hour journey to the Cariboo or the Rockies.

The Sunshine Coast it was then and with the RV packed full of essentials (DVDs, Wii and wine), it was off over the Oak Street Bridge, running the gauntlet with downtown traffic before arriving safe at Horseshoe Bay for the 40-minute ferry ride to Langdale.

Day 1:

First stop on the maiden camping voyage was at the Langdale Heights RC resort, just a few kilometres east along the Port Mellon Highway from the Langdale ferry terminal.

Surrounded by a mist-shrouded forest, but with open views of the local hills and faraway mountains, this cozy RV park is set on tiers which run down to a charming little par 3 golf course — which is complimentary to all RV guests.

Taking pity on the first-timers, the husband/wife management team duly got us “connected,” to the water, sewer and electricity and we were officially Canadian campers!

Unfortunately, it was still March, so the golf course was off limits. But strolling around the golf course's perimeter woodland, I swear I did hear a pin drop as we filled our lungs with the clean, early spring air.

We had a lovely little garden patio and picnic bench on our site, ideal for barbecues in the summer.

And Langdale Heights also has a neat little clubhouse, with a pool table, dart board, lounge, balcony, kitchen and a small gym.

Back to the RV it to curl in to watch a DVD with some pre-packed goodies and later spend our first night camping under the, ahem, stars, with the rain still battering off the roof.



DAY 2:

One of the best things about camping in an RV is the complete and utter convenience.

You need the washroom — you pull over. You fancy a cup of tea — you make one. You fancy some early lunch — let's pull into that parking lot and rustle up some beans on toast.

And one of the best things about driving on the Sunshine Coast is the mostly quiet and wide, sweeping highway.

After leaving Langdale and heading northwest, the highway — which either hugs the coast or near as damn it — pulls you through Gibsons.

However, we didn't have time to stop and I was, by now, loving driving this RV along the highway and it would almost be a shame to make a stop.

There are lots of fascinating pit stops along the coast, not least the artists' haven of Robert's Creek and Wilson Creek, where many tourists and locals alike stop for coffee and supplies.

But all roads led to Sechelt for the latest installment in our mini-adventure, with the Bayside Campground and RV Park our target.

A couple of minutes outside Sechelt, the campground is a mere 100 yards from Porpoise Bay in the Sechelt Inlet.

We found our favoured spot, surrounded by 50-foot trees, a picnic bench, a fire pit and flooded with some glorious late afternoon sunshine.



We hurriedly unpacked the fish and chips we'd picked up in Sechelt and we settled down for a “chippy” on the bench in the March sun.

A stroll down to the beach was next to walk off that lunch.

The best access is via a signed path, about 200 metres to the north of the campsite entrance.

And we were just in time, as the sun was beginning to set and was casting a warm glow across the bay as the final floatplane of the day gently splashed down in front of us.

The dog ran crazy on the sand, our kid, Ben, found things we had no name for among the tidal pools and we parked our

backsides — weary from the snowshoeing — on a washed-up log to bask in the last throws of sunlight.

Back to the campsite before dark and, in true Canadian camping style, we thought we'd gather some wood from around us and start our very own fire.

I must admit, I had a lot of fun trying to chop the chunks of wood with the axe that came with the RV. But have you ever tried to start a fire with damp wood?

About an hour in it, and with as much chance as creating a spark as Spongebob Squarepants, our saviour and the campsite's

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Above left, it's camping time as Alan Campbell sets off from Bridgeport Road. Above, Campbell and son Ben finally get the campfire going. Left, Ben and Hershey enjoy a sand bank on Porpoise Bay, near Sechelt.

Road trip: Reporter bitten by the B.C. camping bug

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owner arrived, asking if we would like some kindling and dry firewood.

Within two minutes, a fire that Grizzly Adams would have been proud of was roaring next to our RV.

You know you've had a good night camping when you wake up next morning and you still smell of smoke.

We never used them, but Bayside also has a washhouse, coin-operated showers, flushable toilets, a sand volleyball court and a playground.

DAY 3:

It was back in the saddle for another stretch up the highway, this time just a 40-minute pleasure drive north to Madeira Park, passing some stunning scenery on the way.

A place which prides itself on being "affordable luxury," the Sunshine Coast Resort Hotel & Marina was our next stop.

When my wife and I originally planned the trip, we felt that, after two nights of "roughing it" in the RV, we might need some civilization, meaning some roofed accommodation.

But I was surprised at how quickly I had grown attached to our RV and I was sad to leave it for the night.

That is, until I saw the spectacular views over Pender Harbour from our pet-friendly ocean view suite and the room's whirlpool bath.

We even had our own little patio — complete with table, chairs and a ready-to-use barbecue — which flowed onto a lawn and then lead to steps down, past lush landscape, to the resort's sundeck and hot tubs, all of which yawns out over the resort's private marina and stares up at Pender Hill.

There are, however, pet and children restrictions for the lawns and the hot tub. And you'll need to hike 75 yards or so back up the steep hill to get to the children's grassy play area.

Nevertheless, the resort is friendly, immaculate and has an organic and intimate feel to it with just 20 rooms/cottages, all of which have an ocean view.

DAY 4:

Madeira Park, another in a seemingly endless line of quaint little fishing villages dotted up and down the highway synonymous with the Sunshine Coast, has some shops, cafes, convenience stores and an artisan ware and home-baking joint called Copper Sky.

But it was back behind the big wheel again and it was a mere half hour drive around to the Garden Bay side of Pender Harbour was our next port of call, with the Pender Harbour Resort our ultimate destination.

Carved out of a secluded treed-corner of the coastline, the Pender Harbour Resort is yet another campsite that has a definite family feel to it and another hideaway that reportedly has become a traditional haunt for large groups of families every year. This resort differs slightly from the others we visited, in that it caters for all camping tastes — from tents to RVs and yurts to luxury cottages.

As an added extra, some of them have ocean views, varying from a slice of the resort's private marina to ocean vistas.

The resort's owner showed us where the kids jump 30 feet or so off a small cliff in the summer into the facility's own marina below.

And she described

how the resort is alive in the peak season with kids cycling around the complex or playing in their heated seawater swimming pool and families barbecuing and inviting their temporary neighbours over for a sip of something strong.

Suffice to say, I've now been bitten by the Canadian camping.

But, after getting "hooked" up to an RV, it may be a while before I progress to a tent.



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RICHMONDNEWS

A view of the sun setting over Pender Harbour, from the Sunshine Coast Resort Hotel & Marina.

If you go:

www.campingrvbc.com has all the information you need to go RVing in B.C. Full hook-up camping fees start at around \$20 per night per site.

www.sunshinecoastcanada.com will guide you around the coast for your trip.

www.wcmcampers.com for West Coast Mountain Campers, off Bridgeport Road. They have a wide selection of camper vans and RVs, with prices starting at around \$200 per night (prices vary depending on season, mileage and amount of people traveling).

www.bcferrries.com for all the fare prices and timetables for the Horseshoe Bay to Langdale route. Taking an RV, two adults and a child across costs around \$100 return.

www.sunshinecoast-resort.com. Prices start at \$109 per room (spring), to \$179 (summer).