

Zeballos bound

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Took a nice drive with the beautiful one the other day.

Out along a gravel road through big limestone hills with a river meandering among them. Then, just as the big river bed flattened and the waters began to back up with the tide...there it was: Zeballos.

It had been 16 years I realized since I had visited the legendary little town that everyone has heard of, but few ever get to. Zeballos, what a memorable name and a memorable place.

For those who grew up on the West Coast there s still a bit of that unexplainable air and feeling about it. A famous little logging and mining town with a few fishermen thrown in to be sure. It pulsates with history indeed!

BC labour history is replete with mention of Zeballos the home of the wobble and the wildcat! Those are labour terms for strikes and near-strikes sometimes precipitated over minor incidents at the cook house or elsewhere.

This, in a long-gone era when rough and ready working men wielded power over large corporations. Zeballos was well known for its labour radicalism. Yes, the International Woodworkers of America reigned for many years in Zeballos.

But gold reigned here too! Indeed, this tiny town bucked the Great Depression with both its gold mines and miners through the 1930s. Thousands bustled in its restricted space between mountain walls and river mouth emptying into a big long and dark inlet.

Thirty years or so later, a big iron mine development flourished for a decade. The town s tiny museum huddled among the multitude of clapboard false-fronted buildings. These, for the most part, are still in use.

Stores, cafes, a community hall, fire hall, school and town hall all remain in fairly good repair despite their age. The quaintness of a Nevada or Arizona township is here somehow transplanted into our lush and thoroughly green wild West Coast wilderness.

The fueling station and dock were busy this summer despite the downturn. Summertime sports fishermen bunk here and there in little lodges.

We dined at the Blue Heron with its pleasant decor and found the cuisine to be excellent indeed! A pleasant Czech waitress gave fine service. The blackberry crumble perfect.

Locals were friendly and a couple approached our table recognizing us from the arts society concerts we both had attended. This reminded us that despite its remoteness, Zeballos is the most southerly location of our region known by many as the North Tip.

The road in was well-graded, though this I understand is not always the case. An hour or two of easy driving time from Highway 19 brings one to this tiny incorporated village by way of various lakes and streams with turnoffs to such things as caves, logging roads, mine sites and even a chance to glimpse Canada s only remaining logging train at the reload just off the highway. Drive carefully and, if you can, stay the night.

Bruce Lloyd lives in Port Alice

There was an immaculately kept campground on the river.

A walk through the streets and trails, then across the bridge leads one to each separated suburb of the teensy town. Likewise, a drive over the

bridge and beyond will find two or three more tiny suburbs, including the reserve on the far edge of town just past the Western Forest shops and marshalling area that once pulsated with a force as hundreds of men attacked the big timber and sent it on to the mills in Tahsis, Gold River and elsewhere.

Those were the glory days for Zeballos to be sure, but despite its size it somehow still thrives with tourism, sports fishing, fish farming and what have you. Certainly Cevallos (the Spanish rendering) will never cease to be a tiny sea port worth the visit.

Its diehard people and steady summer visitors love its quaint and earthy feel far too much.

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