



## Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Newsletter

December 2021

### Important Dates to Remember

<b><i>Tuesday, Dec. 7</i></b>	End-of-year lunch, Oystercatcher, 12:00. Tickets (\$30) at SS Books.
<b><i>Thursday, Jan. 20</i></b>	Stefan Gessinger presentation in the library's Program Room, 19:00.
<b><i>Thursday, Jan. 27</i></b>	Annual General Meeting, 11:30 Lion's Club's Hart Bradley Hall.
<b><i>Thursday, Feb. 24</i></b>	Possible library presentation. Check your email for news.

### End-of-Year Lunch

We'd love to see you! Tickets for our Dec. 7 end-of-year lunch get-together at the Oystercatcher Restaurant are available at Salt Spring Books until Thursday, Dec. 2. The lunch costs \$30 and offers four choices plus coffee or tea. The choices are seafood chowder with focaccia bread, kale and prawn (or tofu) salad, crispy chicken sandwich, and cod and chips. Of course the food is the least of it: the main draw for this event is the chance to socialize with each other in a Covidly safe environment. But don't forget your vax cards and IDs—and your wallet for drinks if you want them.

### AGM and Free Lunch—Thursday, January 27, 2022

Our Annual General Meeting and lunch (yes, there is a free lunch!) will take place on Thursday, January 27, beginning at 11:30 at the Lions Club's Hart Bradley Hall at 103 Bonnet Avenue (at the corner of Drake Road). As the hall is booked for the evening this year, there will be no speaker. The lunch—provided by the club to encourage you to attend and make up the quorum we require—will be followed by a short meeting to review club reports, elect a new board, and discuss club business. Please come and support your club.

## New Board Members Needed

As usual, we're looking for volunteers to help keep the club going. We've been lucky to get a few new people to fill some of the positions vacated by retiring board members. Salan Pazurik has already taken over our website from Debra Rosin who is retiring. Thank you both. And Carron Carson attended her first board meeting last month in preparation for standing for the board at our January AGM. Thanks to her too.

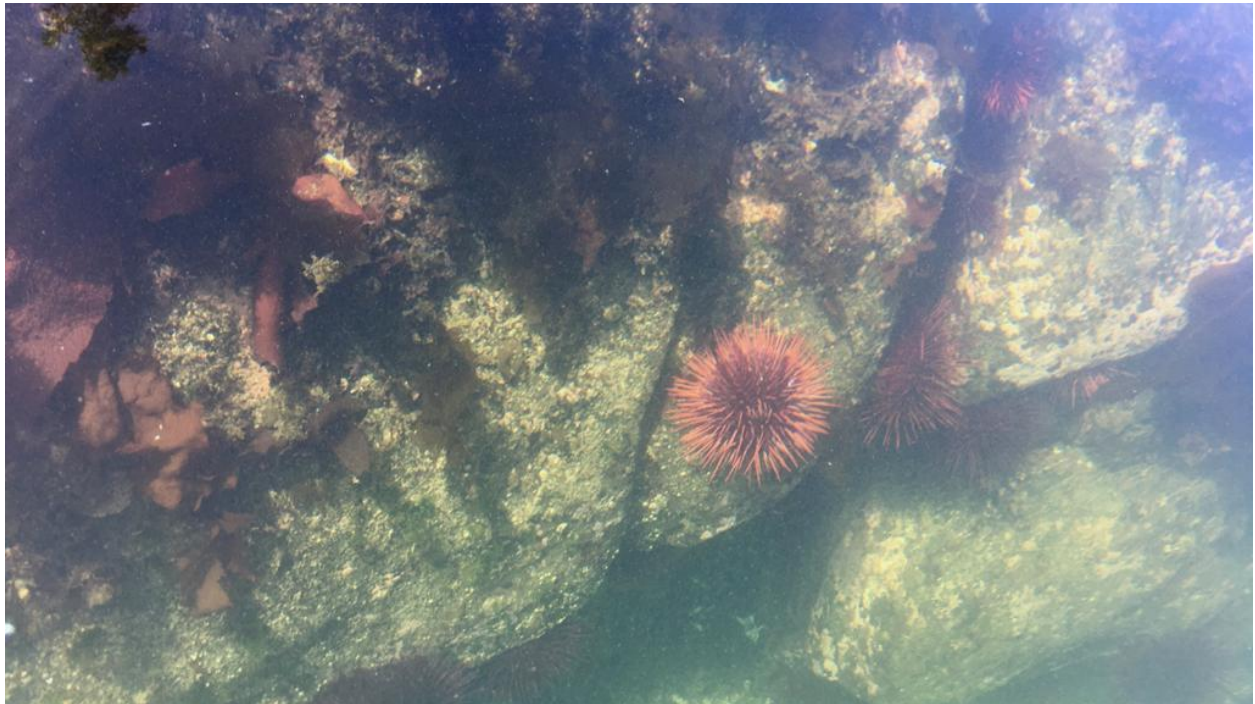
There are still a number of roles to fill, however, including editing this newsletter. Here's the list in case you're feeling motivated to join a very nice group of people who are keeping the club alive. If you don't like coming to meetings, don't worry. Attendance is optional for many roles.

- **Secretary.** Beth Hall has been doing a splendid job as our secretary but wants to retire. This is a shame as we can't imagine a better secretary than Beth has been. Beth will be pleased to help you learn the job when you send in your application for the position. The main role of the secretary is to provide agendas for our four board meetings each year and to take minutes of these meetings.
- **Walk Coordinator.** Sheryl Taylor-Munro and Sheila Spence bravely took over this role when Betty Ann Kruger left the island and they have done a great job. They made it quite clear that they were only filling Betty Ann's shoes until the next AGM. So if you like to walk, here's your big chance to organize the walks you want to do. There are lots of people out there ready to lead the walks. All you have to do is list them each month so people know where the walks are. Pretty simple, right?
- **Rambler Coordinator.** Brian Adderley has indicated that this will be his last year in this position. Which one of you rambles would like to replace him?
- **Presentations Coordinator.** This position is not too onerous because our presentations are co-sponsored with the library. We get to use the Program Room at no charge, and the library helps promote the events, which are scheduled for the third Thursday evening of each month. There is an infinite number of presentations possible and presenters often volunteer to do one. The coordinator gets lots of help with this job, so please consider doing it.
- **Facebook editor.** We need someone to take care of our Facebook page. Few of us have the skills to do this. Sue Lehmann has been doing a fine job of it, but she doesn't want to do it anymore. Can you help with this?
- **Newsletter editor.** We haven't had an editor of this newsletter since Gary Adams retired. For this reason, the newsletters have been sporadic and inconsistent. It's important for members to know what we're doing, especially in these troublesome pandemic days. Please consider volunteering for the job. Again, there are lots of people to help.

## Nature Events

The Salt Spring Island Conservancy has had a number of nature events this fall. You can find out about them on the Conservancy website—<https://saltspringconservancy.ca/events/>.

As well, every month the BC Nature Office Manager, based in North Vancouver, sends out "e-news" to all our members, including a list of events that you can attend. There's much more on the BC Nature website—<https://bcnature.org/>, including the fascinating "Guide to Viewing Wildlife and Nature in BC" on BC Nature's website— <https://bcnature.org/bc-nature-guide/>.



Our members are also free to attend events and outings of all BC Nature's member clubs, such as the Cowichan Field Naturalists in Duncan, the Victoria Natural History Society, or the Rocky Point Naturalists. These events are not advertized by BC Nature, but can be found on the websites of each club. Do some surfing on the net to see what's available.

## Trail Development

We've made some advances to private landowners to obtain permission to use trails on their land with some success, although none of these has resulted in a contract such as the one we have with KDOL, the Buddhist retreat centre. We have an insurance policy with the Gulf Islands Trails Society, of which we are a member, and this covers landowners who sign contracts with us to permit hiking on their lands. Could you be one of these landowners or do you know someone who might be? Send your ideas to Charles at [charleskahn@shaw.ca](mailto:charleskahn@shaw.ca).

## Trail Activities

We've had regular walks, hikes, and rambles with varying numbers of participants. Information on these are provided monthly on the Googlelist but are also listed on our website:

<https://saltspringtnc.ca/index.php/events/>. Please volunteer to lead one of these activities by using this Googlelist or by contacting the hike, walk, and ramble coordinators.

Note that it's OK to bring guests to club events. However, double vaccinations are strongly recommended for all activities, and vaccinations are especially important when car pooling and may be required by the driver. Note that each guest must sign a waiver of liability and must become a member of the club after participating in three events.

## Thursday Evening Presentations in the Library

Nick and Jenny Coghlan made a brilliant presentation on the wildlife of the Falkland Islands in October. Thirty-eight people attended. Needless to say, there were a lot of penguins in the show.



On January 20 Stefan Gessinger will talk about a ski traverse he did last winter from Comox to Tofino. The photos in this presentation are reported to be amazing. If you'd like to make a presentation, please contact Charles at [charleskahn@shaw.ca](mailto:charleskahn@shaw.ca).

By the way, we still need someone to coordinate these evening presentations. Could that be you?



## Trail Work

We've done quite a bit of work on trails since the beginning of the year. Here are a few items from Trails Coordinator Murray Coates's report:

- 21' of boardwalk added to Mt. Erskine, plus more drainage and repair of mesh
- lumber carried from Trustees Trail to Mt. Erskine trails to construct 16 feet of boardwalk to improve drainage
- deadfall cleared on many island trails
- signs replaced in Burgoyne Bay and Mt. Maxwell Provincial Parks
- broom cut in Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park
- trails mapped in Cusheon Cove in anticipation of new signage for Ruckle Park
- a link trail established through the CRD property (with CRD permission) from Ashya Road to Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park and interim signage erected to indicate where people may walk and where they shouldn't walk (i.e., past the septic plant)

Many thanks to Murray and his small army of volunteers for doing all this work and more. The club is the only volunteer organization on the island that regularly creates and maintains our trails.



*Volunteer working on the installation of a bench on Mt. Erskine*

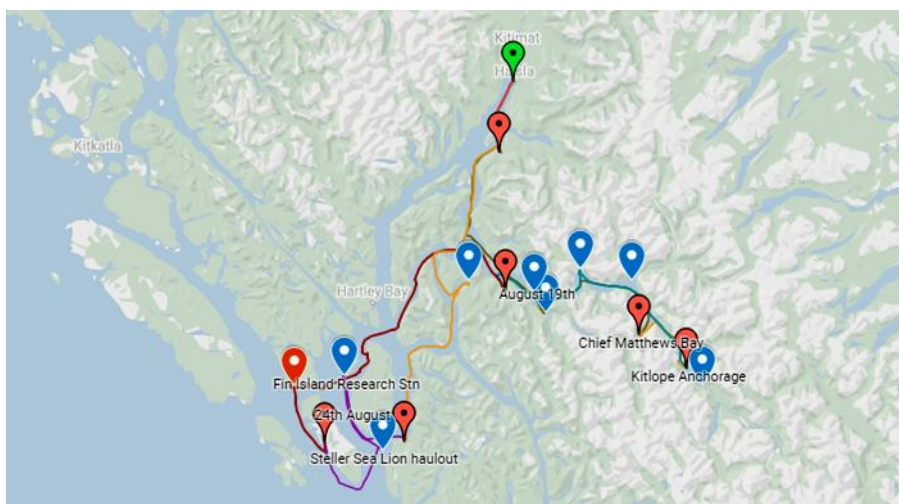
## The Great Bear Rainforest—Kitlope, August 2021, by Charles Kahn

Maple Leaf Adventures offers a number of trips in spectacular BC landscapes. Our choice was the eight-night Great Bear Rainforest—Kitlope August trip aboard the company's 138-foot catamaran *Cascadia*. This luxurious ship can accommodate 12 couples in as many en suite staterooms. Probably thanks to Covid, there were only 15 passengers accompanied by an outstanding 10-person crew on our voyage.



The *Cascadia* in a typical anchorage

The Great Bear Rainforest is the name coined by Ian McAllister for the coastal rainforest of BC extending roughly from just south of Bella Bella to just north of Prince Rupert and as far east as Burns Lake and Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. McAllister and others were working to halt logging, mining, and development in this wild, natural paradise. One result of this activity is the Kitlope Heritage Conservancy established in 1994, largely through the efforts of Cecil Paul, a Haisla chief who organized a consortium of influential individuals in his “magic canoe” to protect the land of his people. (See *Stories from the Magic Canoe of Wa'xaid* by Briony Penn and Cecil Paul.)



Our adventure started and ended in Kitimaat Village. Every day was filled to the brim with activities ranging from kayaking and short walks on beaches and in forest to more passive



activities like whale watching and sightseeing trips in the two well-equipped tenders. In between we enjoyed talks from Michael Jackson, our highly knowledgeable expedition leader.



**Shearwater Hot Springs.** The area has many appealing hot springs. We visited this one on day 2.

This area of the rainforest contains many fiords lined with waterfalls created by the glacial melt on the cliffs above. Our fourth day featured a waterfall tour on one of the tenders with each successive waterfall seeming to be trying to outdo the one we'd just passed.



One of the many great pleasures was the every-changing light. The best light was in the early mornings when wisps of cloud and fog created patterns on the water. We often experienced these from the *Cascadia's* kayaks in blissfully still water. By some miracle, most of our days involved



lovely sunshine. The light changed continuously so that we were constantly delighted by new images that exceeded our cameras' abilities to capture them.



*Early morning light on the water*



In addition to having seven straight days of mainly sunny, dry weather with temperatures around 20°C, we were treated to the most sensational display of humpback whales bubble-net feeding that any of the crew had ever seen. We passed a delightful two hours watching about 17 of these huge mammals repeating this feeding strategy over and over again.





As you will have gathered by now, every day was packed with activities such as:

- visits to Shearwater and Bishop Bay hot springs
- exploration of various locations by tender, including the site of the G'psgolox Pole, where the village of M'iskusa was once located, and the site where Cecil Paul was born
- a tour of the ship's state-of-the-art galley, with Chef Michael as host
- a wine and cheese party on a lovely sand beach
- a clean-up expedition of a beach on Campania Island that the crew had first cleaned last year
- trips by tender to see and identify birds with naturalist Carita Bergman
- a visit to a sea lion colony on Ashdown Island
- a fascinating visit to a whale research station

In between activities there were talks on geology, tides, whales and hydrophones, and two National Film Board films on the G'psgolox Pole and its return from Sweden.



**G'psgolox Pole.** The pole was commissioned in 1872 and exported by the Canadian government to Sweden in 1928. After much negotiation, it was gifted back to the Haisla First Nation in 1994. This is a replica, as the original was returned to nature according to Haisla tradition.

One of our most interesting days included a visit to the Fin Island whale research station. There Project Leader Janie Wray and her two student researchers use hydrophones to identify whales and monitor their movements.



***The whaling station and its volunteers. Janie is the second on the right.***



***The combination of mountains, forest, waterfalls, sea life, and more all contributed to make this an amazing trip.***



## Italy's Camino: The Via Francigena by Kees and Margriet Ruurs

Having hiked the Camino de Santiago several times, we looked for a similar, historic trail in Europe. Preferably without the hordes of visitors that flock to Spain. We found it in Italy. Since the 7th century, a route across Europe was important for trade—and invasions. In Italy this route crosses the Apennines, follows the Magra Valley to Lucca, continues through the Elsa Valley to Sienna, and then follows the ancient Via Cassia to Rome. Roman paving stones were gradually replaced by a network of tracks. Lodgings sprang up to accommodate travellers.



The name of the path was Via Francigena, or “road from France,” since it crossed modern France, the Rhine Valley, and the Netherlands. The route became the main connection between northern and southern Europe, carrying merchants, armies, and pilgrims. Pilgrimages to Rome, to Santiago de Compostela, and to Jerusalem became increasingly important. The path became a communication channel fundamental to the development of Europe in the Middle Ages.

In the year 990 a pilgrim named Sigeric the Serious travelled the path from Canterbury to Rome to be ordained Archbishop. The entire 2,000 km trail is now known as The Canterbury Trail. The 1,000 km Via Francigena portion flourished as a trade route: silk and spices went to northern Europe and were traded for cloth from Flanders and Brabant.



Our starting point was the Museo Via Francigena in Lucca where a fantastic multimedia presentation introduced us to the history of the trail. We walked from Lucca to Viterbo, a 375 km stretch, taking us through Tuscany and a small section of Umbria.



The trail is reasonably well marked. We only needed the Via Francigena (VF) app occasionally to verify we were heading in the right direction. The best time of year for this section is April to May or September to mid-October. Summer in this part of Italy is simply too hot for much hiking. October 2019 was perfect: blue skies, sunny, and not too hot.



Although there were usually other hikers, it was a quiet, sometimes lonely trail, but rooms were often booked well in advance so we had to plan ahead. We had to figure out how far we would walk each day and to book our accommodation ahead of time to ensure a room. However, twice we were all alone in an entire building because the season was over. We also decided on quick-dry clothing, hiking shoes, and backpacks.

We spent two nights in Lucca in a small B & B on the ancient market square in the heart of the city. The modern, clean room was dead quiet, and we simply walked down to the square to have our pick of small Italian eateries. We loved Lucca and want to go back some day.



*As we walked through Tuscany we savoured the sights of cypresses lining the roads like exclamation marks and the musky smell of freshly crushed grapes in the vineyards.*

Margriet did not enjoy hiking with a 15-pound pack and decided to splurge on luggage transport for 15 Euros a day, which made a huge difference. Kees still hauled his own pack while Margriet's bag magically reappeared in the next hotel.

In Ponte di Capiano we had booked two beds in the hostel, a building over a medieval bridge that houses pilgrims. We shared a room with an Italian couple. The delicatessen on the historic square took bookings for *pellegrinos*. Its meals cost nine Euros and included wine and dessert.



*The sign on the right provided a good reason to keep walking.*



We loved the ancient villages where old women hang out their windows to see what's happening on the street below, peeking through geraniums and lines full of laundry. Even though Tuscany is a popular tourist destination, the landscape seems untouched for centuries. City planners must have had incredible foresight to preserve it. In Colle di Valle d'Elsa our room had a view of the medieval city wall.





**San Gimignano.** *San Gimignano is an amazing village where 14 of the original 72 towers remain, creating an imposing skyline in this UNESCO World Heritage site. Pizzerias and ristoranti offer wild boar and truffles and 50 flavours of gelato.*



**Monteriggioni.** *This medieval village is built high on yet another hilltop. It's a beautiful tourist trap full of British and Chinese visitors who arrive by bus. Walking the quiet Via Francigena suited us much better.*



After three days and 50 km of walking Margriet had a blister. Not bad but not pleasant either, so she decided to take a break. While Kees happily continued along the Via Francigena, Margriet soaked in the natural hot springs of Gambassi Terme where they have a special *pellegrino* rate.

It took us a week to walk from Lucca to Sienna. Here Margriet stayed for a week to work while Kees continued hiking for another week to Viterbo, another 250 km closer to Rome. There were many accommodation choices for him along the way, from a 15 Euro a night hostel to 100+ Euros for a 4-star hotel. The trail varied greatly. About 25 percent was on pavement and 5 percent of that was along busy highways where you really have to watch the traffic. Just outside Viterbo we hiked on the original Roman road, which was 14 feet wide to allow two chariots to pass each other.

The season seems to end by mid-October. We often walked through areas totally devoid of people or buildings. It could be lonely, but that was part of the charm. Fall weekends are hunting days when we heard gunshots throughout the day. No wonder we didn't see any wildlife.

Kees decided to stop in Viterbo because the last few sections of the trail lead through Rome's industrial areas. Altogether it was an unforgettable hike through some of the most beautiful historic towns and landscapes Europe has to offer.





*There's free water and snacks for pilgrims along the way.*

If you do this walk, make sure to take lunches because there are stretches where there is absolutely nothing to be had. And when shopping in Italy keep track of the time. Stores open early but, as in Spain, they close again for a long siesta. By 1 p.m. most shops are firmly closed and only open again around 4 p.m. They then stay open in the evening until 9, 10, or even 11.

For budget conscious pilgrims, hostels are cheap: 15 to 20 Euros. However, there is often no heat in many of these hostels, so on a few nights we slept with our socks on.

Here are some useful links:

- the trail's official site: <https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/>
- The museum in Lucca: <http://www.viafrancigenaentrypoint.eu/en>
- Ostello Ponte Di Capiano: <https://www.viefrancigene.org/it/resource/accomodation/3967/>
- other accounts of our travels: [www.globetrottingbooklovers.com](http://www.globetrottingbooklovers.com)