



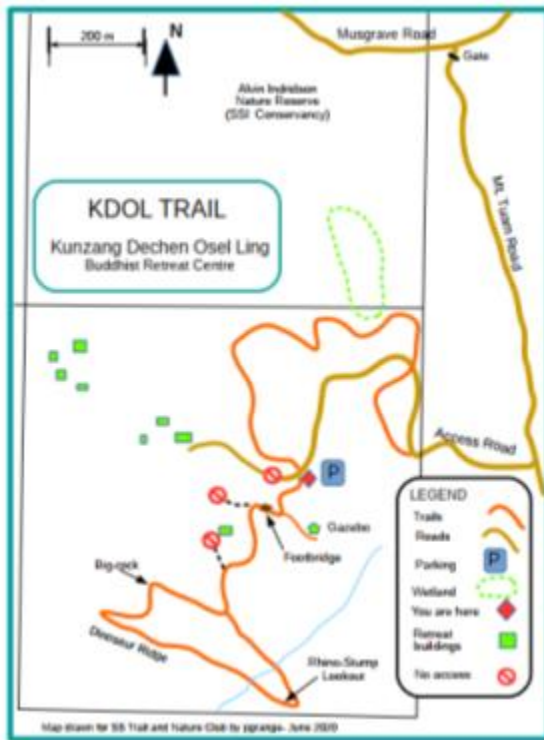
Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
Newsletter

June 2020

Trail Updates

In this time of COVID, some of us have been very busy. The trail map for the KDOL (Buddhist retreat centre) map, designed by Philip Grange, is now ready to be installed at trail intersections. We think you will like it. You are welcome to hike these trails, which are now signed, but KDOL would like you to let them know that you're coming. Please email kdol268@gmail.com or call 250-380-8610 before you go.



KDOL Trails



Cusheon Cove trails

We've also mapped the trails in Cusheon Cove, which you may be familiar with through hikes led by Ashley Hilliard and Sharon Sullivan, who both live nearby. The Cusheon Cove map, developed for us by Nicholas Courtier, has now been submitted to BC Parks. Once we have walked the trails with park representatives and they have given us their approval, we will produce and erect the signage. The club has done this for all the provincial parks except for Ruckle.

Hiking Holland: Exploring the Netherlands on foot along The Pieterpad by Kees Ruurs

Spain has the Camino de Santiago; Canada has its Trans-Canada Trail; Peru boasts the Inca Trail; and the Netherlands has the Pieterpad (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieterpad). Relatively unknown in the rest of the world, this nearly 500 km trail allows hikers to explore the entire country on foot from north to south or visa versa.

The Pieterpad runs from Pieterburen, in the northern part of Groningen, then south through the eastern part of the Netherlands to just south of Maastricht. It ends on the top of Mount Saint Peter, at a height of 109 metres (358 ft.). If you decide to hike it, plan on spending about 25 days, walking 20 km each day, but allow yourself a few days of rest.



The Pieterpad provides a varied and often beautiful walk, passing through woods, polders (flat areas edged by dikes), heathland, and numerous small Dutch villages. It is relatively well signed and served by public transport and overnight accommodation throughout its length. Friends on Bikes (vriendenopdefiets.nl/index.php/en) offers B & B accommodation solely to hikers and cyclists in people's home.

I flew to Amsterdam at the beginning of September and took the train to the city of Groningen where I stayed for a few nights while hiking the first couple of sections of the Pieterpad, using the train and bus to reach trailheads.

My first impression was the wide open spaces that the Groningen landscape offers. Rich, dark clay soils have made these farmers wealthy over the centuries. Most of the farms are several thousand acres and produce potatoes and sugarbeets. In less arable areas, I saw Frisian and Groninger dairy cows, which have been exported around the world as breeding stock. Much of this part of the trail follows a narrow asphalt path through the flat, green countryside or along a canal.

For the first two and a half days I walked through the green fields and wide open spaces of Groningen. Then I crossed into the next province, Drenthe, and within a few kilometres the landscape gave way to forests, smaller fields, and different small-scale farming. En route a short side trip took me to *hunebedden*, 5,000-year-old graves of the first inhabitants of the lowlands. How they moved these impressive piles of huge rocks under which their dead were buried is a mystery.

One highlight was Coevorden, an ancient city dating back to the 12th century as the business centre for the northeastern part of the Netherlands. A historic castle has been renovated as a hotel, and the city boasts beautiful old houses and cafés. A 17th century defensive wall surrounds the old part of the city. I came across a Café Vancouver and learned that the forefathers of Captain Vancouver were originally from Coevorden (Van Coevorden).



Coevorden



Ferry on the Oude IJssel

My wife, Margriet, joined me in Dieren and the next day we borrowed bicycles. We enjoyed crossing the Oude IJssel river on a two-car ferry. It's attached to an anchor upstream, and by maneuvering the boat under a certain angle, the captain guides the ferry across the river without much mechanical help.

The possibilities of bicycling around the Netherlands are endless. You can buy packages that include bikes, hotels, and meals. Or you can follow the more than 35,000 km of well-signed trails on your own.

The following day we stayed in Kasteel Vorden (kasteelvorden.nl/overnachten.html), which was originally built in 1207, destroyed during the 80-year war with Spain in the 16th century, and rebuilt shortly thereafter. The castle hotel has been very little altered. We reached our room by climbing a winding staircase of worn stone steps, slept in a canopy bed, and felt like royalty.

On one memorable day I headed for Montferland. I had no idea the area was so hilly! Gorgeous forests, narrow trails, and nothing but trees and hills. But the fun was short-lived when after two hours I realized I had missed a turnoff and was horribly lost. It took me another hour to find my way out of the forest, ending up in Germany. The border in that area is quite vague and I never even noticed that I had wandered across it. After an hour and an extra 5 km, I found the trail and started making progress again.

Perhaps the most gorgeous landscapes were between Gennep and Vierlingsbeek—beautiful, hilly terrain with moors, forests, wild goats and not a soul around.

And everywhere there are centuries of history. At one point near the end of the walk, we stood on a burial hill that dates from around 800 BC. We walked along a 2,000-year-old Roman road. We also stood in village market squares where centuries-old buildings had been destroyed during the Second World War and rebuilt in the last 75 years. Most of the church steeples along the Maas were blown up by the Germans in their retreat to prevent Allied forces from using them as viewing towers.

The terrain got hillier the farther south we got into Limburg. The scenery is absolutely breathtaking most of the way. It was fun to stop at a restaurant in a castle, which happened to be for sale. We were surrounded by beautiful scenery along narrow roads, with old limestone farm houses, wineries, and fields dotted with black and white cows.



Typical houses in the southern part of Limburg



Margriet and Kasteel Vorden

Finally, we reached St. Pietersberg after a long climb. There I received an official certificate testifying that I had walked the entire trail. It had been a terrific experience, with mostly good weather and few physical problems. From the end of the Pieterpad it is possible to keep walking to Rome or to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. It's only about 2,000 km from here to southern France. Someday I hope to do that and connect to the Camino de Santiago where I completed my first pilgrimage twelve years ago.

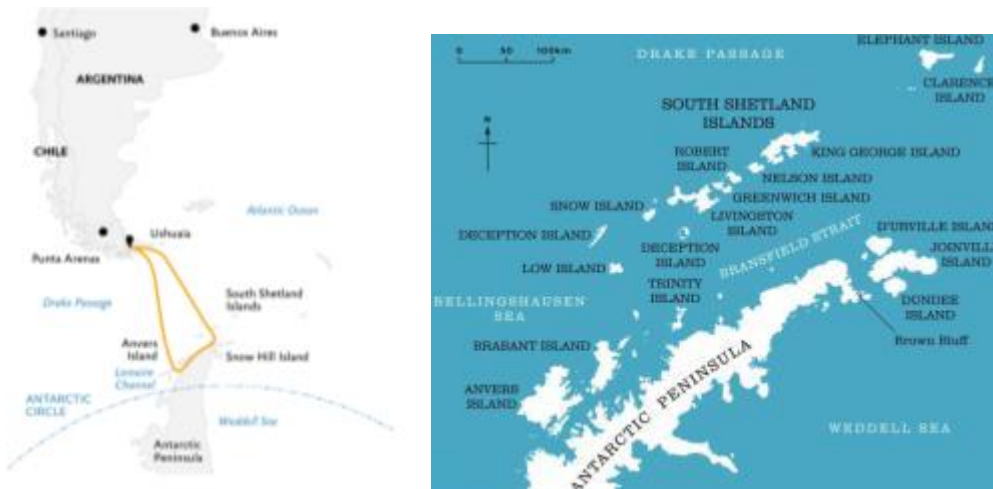
For more information about the trail, contact Kees at ruurs@shaw.ca.

Antarctica

by Murray Coates

In January, we completed what might be our last travel adventure—a trip to the Antarctic Peninsula. This was our seventh and last continent and my 104th country. The long trip to our boat in Ushuaia involved flying first to Buenos Aires and then staying overnight. In Ushuaia we toured Terra del Fuego National Park, riding on a steam train and spotting 15 species of birds in about 2 hours.

The company we travelled with was Quark Expeditions, and our boat was the *Ocean Diamond*. It carried 189 guests and 144 crew. On the first morning we experienced a number of interesting presentations, including ones on Antarctica history and marine biology. In the afternoon we were each equipped with a brilliant yellow expedition parka and muck boots. We were told not to take any biological material off the ship so we had a clothing inspection and a cleaning event. On every exit and entry to or from the ship we would have to dip our feet in a disinfectant.



Sunday January 12 was our first day in Antarctica. We arrived at about 5:00 am and immediately started seeing huge icebergs, skuas (predatory birds), and the odd humpback whale. I was up on deck early and went to the bridge to watch the captain steer us through the Lemaire Channel. We saw a group of gentoo penguins on an iceberg.

Our first zodiac landing was near the Yalour Islands on the Antarctica peninsula. The typical zodiac load is 10 people plus the guide. We bundled up in the parkas, mandatory waterproof pants, waterproof gloves, tuques, etc.

There was a well communicated protocol for how to act in the zodiac including photography etiquette. The guides will try to navigate sideways to a photographic subject (like a seal) and the near-side five are supposed to kneel down allowing the outside five to stand up so everyone gets a good picture opportunity. Of course there always seemed to be some who break the rules! Still, we had a spectacular first tour seeing thousands of adelic penguins amid the scenic icebergs.



After 1.5 hours in the zodiac, we returned to the ship for the usual "modest" lunch. After lunch we cruised for another hour and a half, visiting the Vernadsky Research Station (once British but now Ukrainian) and seeing crab eater seals, weddel seals, blue eyed cormorants, snowy sheathbills, and south polar skuas.



Gentoo penguin (both photos) and crabeater seal on the right

The next day we crossed the Antarctic circle at 7:00 am which was celebrated with champagne on deck. By the third day we were starting to see a lot of humpback whales. They were feeding on small shrimp-like creatures known as krill, which is also an important food for penguins.

The next few days were much more active as we started doing combination land and zodiac tours with the land portion involving steep climbs of up to 300 metres past penguin colonies (chinstrap and gentoo penguins). Descents were a bit slippery and it was quite helpful to have a ski pole. These climbs (in my opinion) provided a valuable offset to an otherwise rather sedentary experience.

One afternoon after a long ship ride, we stopped at Enterprise Island and did a zodiac tour, which included a visit to a 100-year-old shipwreck. Enterprise Island was once a whaling site. Our last zodiac tour was to Half Moon Island, where we visited the Argentine Cámara Base. Both research stations and cruises are governed by an Antarctic treaty which dates from 1961 and is due to expire in 2048. As of 2014 there were 68 research stations, but the number seems to be increasing due to the lure of oil under the ice.

Our return from Antarctica was fairly rough with wave heights of over 20 feet, which apparently is nothing compared to what the Drake Channel can produce when it really gets going. Our ship made it into Ushuaia harbour right on time with the Beagle Channel calm as usual. After a last breakfast and farewells to all, we departed the ship at 8:00 am

Our trip home was another gruelling ordeal: over 24 hours, with 19 on planes. It was a wonderful trip but it was also good to be home in time to get ready for physical distancing.



This and That

Thanks to Kees Ruurs and Murray Coates for providing stories for this newsletter. We're interested in ideas for future newsletters. We're also still interested in finding someone to be our newsletter editor. You can see how easy it is: people send you articles, and all you have to do is assemble them.

We might want to do some trail maintenance in the next little while, and as some of you indicated a desire to help with this, please send your contact information to Murray Coates (m.coates@shaw.ca), Kees Ruurs (keesruurs@hotmail.com), or Charles Kahn (charleskahn@shaw.ca) and we'll include you when we have something planned. If you are interested in "adopting a trail" and maintaining/monitoring it, let Murray know. If you wish to contact anyone on our board, email info.sstnc@gmail.com.

Vice-President Kees Ruurs has received some suggestions for rethinking the club, which we will consider at our next board meeting. Please send him any other ideas you might have about the club and how we can best serve our members in our changing world.

Hopefully we will be able to do some group hiking/walking/rambling/bird and flower watching again in the fall. We're also hoping to have some more fascinating talks available. However, don't wait for us. Our parks are open and beautiful, and while we may not be able to do much travelling right now, we are encouraged to spend as much time as possible outdoors. So get out there and enjoy our stunning environment.