

Summers in Smithers



Lake Louise, in the Rocky Mountains.

My summer trips to Smithers gradually changed from bus to my Silverado pickup. I usually crossed at Detroit and back into Canada at Sweetgrass, Alberta. The US section of the trip was shorter, cheaper and more interesting than the Canadian route, because going through Canada meant I had to drive east to Toronto and then north of Lake Superior. At one interesting rest stop in Montana I got my camera out to photograph two buffalo, one lying down and one standing. I then realized their mouths and tails were moving! I had to jump out of the way as they began wandering out of the rest area! They were alive!

There were occasions when the Canadian route was more practical, like when I drove Boni and her Australian friend west or when Mark and I moved all my belongings to my new home in Smithers. The difference via Canada was usually a half day more of driving and \$100 dollars more in gas.



Live buffalo at a prairie rest stop, Silverado pickup in background.



South of Calgary Alberta, looking west from the prairies.

Life in the Bulkley Valley was never dull! After the Mountainside Restaurant experience, the kids got involved with several other work and social activities. Susan gardened and joined a tree planting crew, and Mark cooked for tree planting outfits. Susan would helicopter into mining exploration camps (eg uranium in Nunavut) as cook and first aid attendant. She also had contracts at Positive Living North and with the BV Airshed Management Society.

I became a grandfather at the age of 75, when my daughter Susan gave birth to my granddaughter Soleil Alexandria in 2009. My grandson Angus Jason was born in 2016.

In addition to Mark's restaurant and farm jobs he became involved, sometimes as leader, in several social programs. The list of programs included Grendelivery (2004), Groundbreakers, Community Shared Agriculture (CAS), WWOOFers, market days and catering for certain



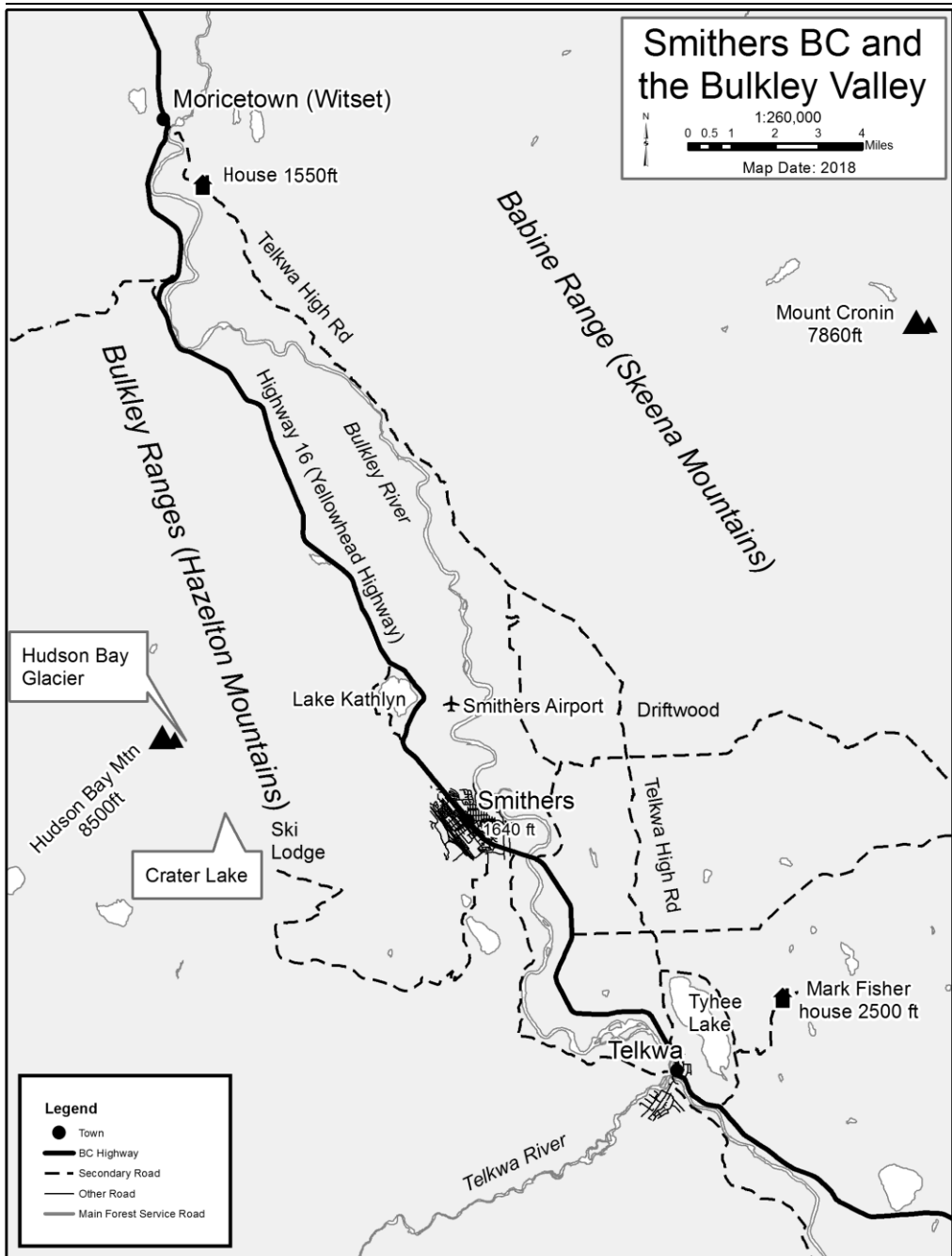
John Fisher helps in Mark's food booth at ArtsWells Festival in Wells BC, 2015



Catching salmon at Witset on the Bulkley River.



Totem pole at K'san Historical Village, near Hazelton BC.



events. He also had a mobile kitchen which he set up at festivals and fairs. All these activities were tied as much as possible to the organic produce he raised on his farm.

In the fall of 2014 he was acclaimed as Director for Area A to the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District.

Meanwhile, I took advantage of Mark's and the Brookes' locations which were 50 km apart, with sleepovers. I brought in sleeping accommodations at each of the kids' places, but I abandoned them after I acquired my rental house on 2nd Avenue in Smithers in 2014.

Two summer highlights were the hikes Susan and I took to the face of the Hudson Bay Mountain glacier, and the hike Mark and I took to Crater Lake. Both features are on the nearby mountain at 5500 feet elevation.

Traveling on the Telkwa Highroad or on Highway 16 between the three locations or even at each location, there was always the possibility of encounters with bear, deer, moose, porcupines, wolves, coyotes or domestic animals, especially cattle. Once, on Mark's 20 foot deck, I looked up from my potato peeling to see a bear at the other end of the deck. Mark's dog, Chomsky, saw the bear at the same time as I did and chased it into the bush. Moose occasionally wander into Smithers and according to my neighbour even into my front yard.

How long does it take to become an accepted member of the new community or province? It all depends on your level of comfort and interaction with the community. For me it was probably my travel experience and geographic background that made adjustment to my new physical and lifestyle environment in Smithers easier to accept.



The Brookes family entertains at a Christmas concert: Susan, Angus, Ben and Soleil, 2016.



John hugs a tree on Haida Gwaii, ca 2005.



John and Soleil on the mobility scooter at John's Smithers home, 2016.



The Valley Youth Fiddlers perform at Midsummer Festival in Smithers, 2004.



Susan Brookes and Mark Fisher at Midsummer Festival in Smithers, ca 2010.



Local politicians of the Smithers area: Taylor Bachrach, Smithers Mayor; Darcy Repen, Telkwa Mayor; Mark Fisher, Bulkley-Nechako Regional District Director; Nathan Cullen, MP Skeena-Bulkley Valley (NDP); Doug Donaldson, MLA Stikine (NDP), ca 2017.

The kids introduced me to people and events, which made my transition easier. Things like provincial driver's license and medical card were converted to meet British Columbia requirements.

The Town of Smithers, as a regional centre (halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert) has a hospital, arenas, 26 eating places, Coast Mountain College, performance theater, folk and classical music festivals, a big fall fair and street locations for entertainment. In Smithers, I mostly use my mobility scooter even though I am still (2018) able to drive my pickup truck to places and events out of the core area. The municipal and private facilities in downtown Smithers are very accommodating for a mobility scooter.

Smithers has spectacular mountain scenery, which includes the nearby 8500 foot peaks and winter ski trails that can be seen from my porch. The weather is not much different from my former Southern Ontario location as the more northerly latitude of Smithers has been moderated by the nearness of the warm Pacific Ocean currents. However, that northern latitude makes much longer summer days and much shorter winter days.

Smithers is in Witsuwit'en First Nation territory. Although Southwestern Ontario has many FN heritage sites and Indian Reserves, the FN presence (approximately 12% of population) in the Smithers area is much more visible in terms of facilities and general recognition of FN rights to land resources even though no formal treaty has been signed with the Witsuwit'en.

I also made contact with the Nisga'a First Nation, which has a signed treaty, but social and economic still issues need to be solved.