

# On the Shores of Kelsey Bay

Where the good things in life are plentiful...and the Boom Boat Ballet captivates one and all!

by Jackie Lyons, Sayward, B.C.

My husband Darryl has been retired from Air Canada for over 30 years. We lived on a small Gulf Coast Island off the B.C. mainland for roughly 20 of those years, and then decided to move to the “Big Island,” where we felt that Sayward would be perfect. A small village of about 350 people on the upper east coast of Vancouver Island, nestled in the mountains, Sayward is essentially a retirement village situated on the unceded territories of the K’omoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

We have resided here for nearly eight years now, and enjoy all the area has to offer. The most famous activity of all, which attracts visitors from around the world, is the annual Kusam Klimb, where participants take on a wild and

rugged 23-kilometre loop that heads up and around the back of Mount H’Kusam, then downwards to the Stowe Creek watershed.

The wildlife roams freely throughout the village leaving us in awe of their beauty, remembering to be respectful of their wildness. Community events keep the locals in touch regularly—dinners, music, arts, picnics, fish fries, you name it! Hobby farms abound as do farmers’ markets and artisans. A day will not go by where you want for something to do. Hiking, fishing whale-watching tours and more are moments away in Kelsey Bay. Or, you can just sit peacefully along the beach, taking in the shoreline and the skies above.

One of the most intriguing things to me is the Kelsey Bay “log sort.” Situated on the water’s

edge, owned and operated by Western Forest Products, the log sort is where local workers do exactly that—sort the logs harvested from the surrounding areas and prepare them to be shipped.

When the loggers are done their jobs high in the mountains, the logs are loaded on to huge semis. From our village, you can watch the trucks make their way down the sheer cliff-sided roads, leaving

**Clockwise from above: The Kelsey Bay Boom Grounds with Johnstone Strait in the background; a wee Sidewinder at work; a huge Wagner 4WD Logstacker.**

plumes of dust in their wake. As they head into the Kelsey Bay land sort, they’re met by a voice over a loudspeaker, “Inbound complete,” a message that echoes down our valley far and wide.

Humongous machinery, reminding children (of all ages) of those big yellow Tonka trucks so many have played with, can be seen at work at the log sort. Unloaders grasp the logs with open arms from the trucks and deposit them into piles. For me as I watch in awe, it all reminds me of a ballet. Driving, spinning, twirling, back and forth they go. Arms outstretched, as if dancing, and putting on a show. The children

watching may see other amazing things in their imaginations, huge dragons and dinosaurs of old. More vehicles arrive and with crab-like arms they pick up piles of logs and place them near the water’s edges in upright bundles, which are then coiled up tightly by a machine called the Bandit.

Witnessing the choreographed behemoths at work, you can’t help but feel Lilliputian-like in comparison. Or possibly share the sentiments of forest gnomes watching with sadness as their homes are stripped and laid upon the ground.

The machines all hurry and scurry about as if continuing to dance, swaying to and fro to not step on each other’s toes. Along the bay’s edge, the booms are wrapped and made ready for a gentle nudge. Then off they go, splashing wildly into the bay below, causing huge waves that

seem to go out to sea forever.

Within the bay, the booms sit harnessed together. Remaining logs are left to be put in place by the Sidewinder boats. Those tiny vessels are so fun to watch as they wobble from side to side but never tip over as they align all the booms in what the locals call the Boom Boat Ballet. Then along come the boom men to run atop, making sure all is secure. Pros at the job, I’ve yet to see one of them fall in.

Large tug boats await on moving day. One is positioned in front of the boom to pull, another at back to push. And thus they journey across the Straits to Vancouver, where the logs await their new buyer and final resting place. To me, the land sort is awe-inspiring, as are Kelsey Bay, our cozy village of Sayward and beautiful Sayward Valley embracing it all. ■



PHOTOS: JANET GILMORE BAKER

