



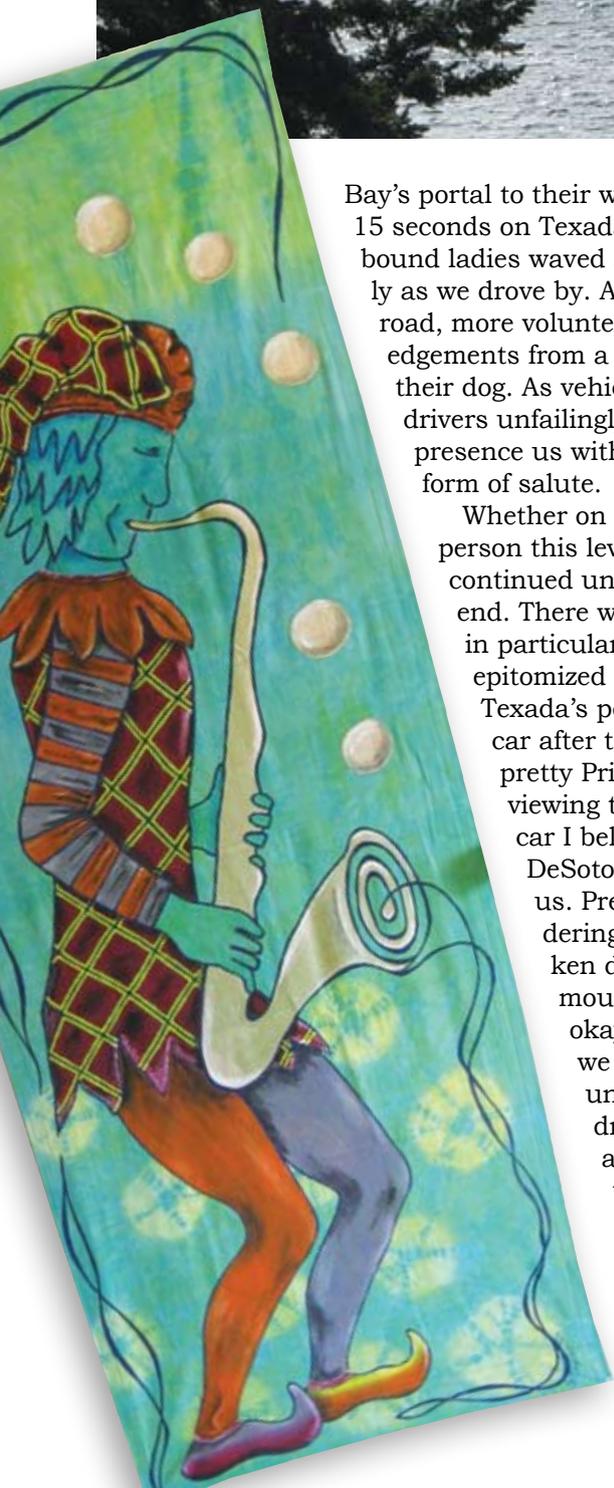
CRANKY HERON COTTAGE ON TEXADA ISLAND: 31 MILES OF SMILES

By David Morrison

When arriving by sea, the decidedly unromantic sight of Blubber Bay Quarry all but swallowing the ferry terminal may go some way to explain why Texada Island is not traditionally viewed as an obvious vacation spot. Indeed, even the name Blubber Bay does not exactly fill one with promise of exotica in waiting. Named for the island's early 20th century involvement in the whaling industry, it serves only to lend dark overtones to Texada's drably functional point

of entry. And the fact remains, of course, that the economy of the largest Gulf Island is not reliant on or driven by tourism, but rather by industry, principally the production of limestone and aggregates. Therefore, Texada has priorities other than dressing itself up all pretty for visitors.

Yet in a classic example of the folly in judging a book by its cover, once off the ferry the true and bountiful charms of Texada are easily found. First and foremost, this island's inhabitants seem inordinately cheery, communally offering a welcome offsetting the industrial homeliness of Blubber



Bay's portal to their world. We were just 15 seconds on Texada when two ferry-bound ladies waved and smiled broadly as we drove by. A little way up the road, more volunteered acknowledgements from a couple walking their dog. As vehicles passed, their drivers unfailingly recognised our presence us with a nod or some form of salute.

Whether on the road or in person this level of sociability continued unabated all weekend. There was one instance in particular, however, that epitomized the warmth of Texada's people. Sat in the car after taking photos at pretty Priest Lake, I was reviewing the snaps when a car I believe was a 1950s DeSoto pulled alongside us. Presumably wondering if we had broken down, the driver mouthed, "Are you okay?" "Yes thanks!" we responded in unison, and off he drove. Whoever you are, sir, you are a true gentleman.

Typically amiable Texadans would be our weekend hosts, Shelley and Ted Thomp-

son. They moved to the island from Tumbler Ridge in 1990 so Ted could take a position at the quarry. Today they live just across the Malaspina Strait in Powell River, pursuing other ideas and opportunities, but retain strong links to the 31-mile long strip of land they called home for two decades. For the first seven months on Texada they lived in the building that is now the Holtenwood Gallery & Café Casita, close to Blubber Bay, until finding a dream property after a tip-off.

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"Everything here happens by word of mouth, so if you're not used to small town stuff it's a lot of fun," Ted says. "We heard from a contractor at the quarry that this place was for sale, took one look and walked in with an offer. We thought it was a wonderful 'Huck Finn/Tom Sawyer'-type place to bring up the kids."

He's referring to a house that since September 2009 has been known as Cranky Heron Cottage, our main reason for this Texadan weekend. Christened for the "crazy" local Great Blue Heron population, the Thompson's new business venture was their former family home. Indeed, it still looks and feels much like one, as all that's missing is the family's own personal effects. My wife Susan nicely summed up the accommodation's lived-in cosiness when commenting: "It feels like visiting someone who isn't here!" Once we'd settled in she said: "All that's missing is our cat!"

The location of Cranky Heron Cottage is wonderful. Perched above the beach at Gillies Bay (one of the two main Texada settlements; the other is Van Anda), it looks out across the sea and south to Vancouver Island. The entrance takes guests straight into the fully fitted and equipped kitchen, which merges with a dining area



and spacious living room offering great views, a library of books, TV/radio and comfy sofas.

There are three bedrooms, two of which belonged to the Thompson's children and, still intended as such, remain decorated accordingly. One bears a zebra theme with mural to suit, while the other boasts a fabulous depiction of one Forsythe Pendleton "Jughead" Jones III from *Archie® Comics*. These are Shelley's work, as are the various wall hangings, screens and superb framed photographs decorating the cottage throughout. (See these and more at her website: www.blubberbaydesign.com) We really liked her jester banners hanging from the kids' bedroom doors. They were originally designed for the island's *Jazz on the Rocks* events, staged in disused quarry sites between 2004 and 2007. As founding members of the Texada Arts, Culture & Tourism Society (TACT), Shelley and Ted were actively involved in setting up these concerts.

The icing on the Cranky Heron Cottage cake is the easy access from the backyard, down through arbutus trees via a short, custom-built trail to the rocky beach below. If you are like us you'll love to explore this stretch of wild coastline, where ravens nest in the trees fringing the edge of the land.

We really enjoyed our stay here, particularly as Ted made everything so easy in advance of our arrival. Supplying a ton of information so we could get the best from a brief stay, "Cranky" Ted—as he signs off his emails—entertained us in this way for weeks before we set foot on Texada. Evidence of the dry humour with which he delivered it is found

throughout the "Cranky Guide" found in the cottage: On keeping the gate of the front yard secured after leaving it, the guide says: *"You will see the critical bungee cord which is an attempt to foil the raccoons (whom are very crafty at removing tasty treats and have an IQ much superior to my own)."* Another instruction states: *"Please give the doors a tug when you leave. We did have a door blow open and were greeted by a distressed robin and appropriate gifts."* And in respect of the pet friendly booking policy in place for his accommodation, Ted tells me: "We say on our website to ask us, but if you want to bring 21 dogs from your sled team, well... we'll talk!"

With such a charming host, who could resist a stay at Cranky Heron Cottage? Texada may be a sleepy, rural destination behind its industrial frontage, but there is still *plenty* to do, so it's the perfect family base from which to explore. The lovely Shelter Point beach is nearby, and there is an abundance of hiking and mountain bike trails to follow, the 532-metre Mt. Pocahontas presenting a good challenge. World-class scuba diving and snorkelling is available—especially amongst the octopi of Grilse Point—and there is great fishing and kayaking to be had. Local history buffs will enjoy the two museums, and for golf nuts there's the 9-hole Dear Leap course. Fine (but excellent value) dining is available a short drive from the cottage at the Tree Frog Bistro: the menu, especially concerning desserts, is to die for.

Above all, reason enough to check out this island is that



its 1,200 or so residents really do greet their visitors like long-lost family. It's great in this respect and, after all, what is travel without meeting the locals and learning about their lives? So while many of the Gulf Islands' attractions and communal leanings have earned them corresponding nicknames, modest Texada can definitely lay claim to being 'The Friendly Island.' No, make that 'The *Friendliest* Island.' ●

Cranky Heron Cottage is situated at 2810 Sanderson Rd, Gillies Bay. For booking information visit www.crankyheron.com or contact 'Cranky' Ted and Shelley Thompson by email at crankyheroncottage@hotmail.com or by telephone on (604) 223-2341. Ted and Shelley offer a free night's credit for every 10-night stay, transferable to family and friends.



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