

Fort Langley

The Birthplace of British Columbia

ON NOVEMBER 19, British Columbia is officially 150 years old. On that date in 1858, Sir James Douglas proclaimed the province a Crown Colony. Understandably, he is now referred to as the "Father of BC". This historic event took place where the village of Fort Langley now stands, the site of the first European settlement on the Lower Mainland.

It was here that the Hudson's Bay Company set up a trading post in 1827 to trade furs with the West Coast First Nations, later branching out into salmon and cranberries. In 1858, however, the fort took on an unexpected role beyond its original intentions, serving as a vital supply centre for the first BC Gold Rush.

Over thirty thousand hopefuls gathered on the banks of the Fraser River in search of their fortunes. This influx included many thousands of Americans, prompting concerns that the United States would soon annex the area. Consequently, Douglas made his move

to secure the future of the region, becoming British Columbia's first governor in the process. The rest, as they say, is history.

The fascinating days of Fort Langley's pioneers provide a must-see attraction at the **Fort Langley National Historical Site**. Visitors should allow a minimum of two hours here, as there is plenty to take in and lots of fun things to do. In addition, the **Langley Centennial Museum** and self-explanatory **BC Farm Machinery and Agricultural Museum** offer further insights into the lives of BC's earliest European citizens.

Immaculate heritage buildings like the early twentieth century CN Station and pastel-

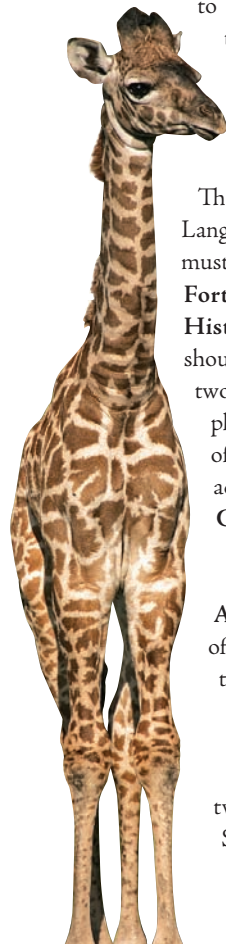
coloured Community Hall also serve to enhance visitors' experiences of this historical hotbed.

Today, Fort Langley is a delightful village community of some 2,700 residents, and an essential historical destination for visitors to the province. Part of the Township of Langley, the village sits in a peaceful rural location on the Bedford Channel of the Fraser River, midway between Vancouver and the US border.

"I think it's a unique community in the Lower Mainland," beams resident Stan Duckworth, General Manager of Brae Island Regional Park. Duckworth enjoys the convenience, ambience and community spirit of the village. "I can walk to everything," he says, "and everyone seems to know each other; it's a real small town atmosphere here."

The charming character of Fort Langley is certainly one factor appreciated by residents and visitors alike, but there is more to Fort Langley than just historical attractions. Its location, for example, ensures that river sports such as kayaking are popular, while the trail network includes the picturesque Fort-to-Fort Trail. Linking the site of the Hudson Bay Company's original fort in Derby Reach Park with the Fort Langley National Historical Site, the trail is in daily use by joggers and cyclists.

The village boasts excellent choice in dining and shopping. Notable eateries include the elegant **Bedford House Restaurant & Lounge** at the river's edge and, for a more casual experience, **The Fort Pub & Grill**. After lunch, a wander around the shops and antiques emporia could conclude indulgently with



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Far left: See wondrous wildlife at Mountain View Conservation Centre (Tim King/TKOFOTO); Below left: Rustic Fort Langley gate (Graham Osborne/Vancouver, Coast & Mountains Tourism Region); Left: Fort Langley drug store and retail outlet in the Coronation Block, early 1900s (Langley Centennial Museum Photograph #934)

a visit to **Euphoria Chocolates**, purveyors of delicious handcrafted truffles and other goodies. For a great family outing, check out **The Mountain View Conservation Centre**, a non-profit facility that hosts endangered wildlife species including giraffes, zebras and 15 species of wild cats.

Wine buffs simply should not miss **The Fort Wine Co.**, specialists in fruit table wines and fortified dessert wines that have thus far scooped up almost fifty awards. Sample their famous wares in the cosy, old-style saloon bar. Winery tours are also available.

In October, the annual **Cranberry Festival** celebrates their proud berry history with a pancake breakfast, marketplace, canoe regatta, entertainment, activities, contests with prizes and of course, cranberry sales.

There will of course be a major celebration in Fort Langley to mark the big anniversary. It will not, however, be taking place on November 19, but over the more obvious BC Day weekend. The town has long celebrated BC's birthday on Brigade Days with historical enactments and a canoe brigade. This year's events run August 2 to 4. Duckworth, also President of the Fort

Langley Business Improvement Association, says there is much to look forward to:

"At the birthplace of BC, there'll be a variety of festivals and activities," he reveals. "We're doing a long weekend of family-focused community celebrations, but they are all still in the planning stages." He advises visitors planning on attending the party to keep abreast of events news at www.fortlangley.com.

There is an old saying: "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow." Considering how British Columbia has developed over the last 150 years to become the prosperous, vibrant province it is today, this could certainly be applied to little Fort Langley.

Happy 150th Birthday, BC!

—David Morrison 


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