

7 ISSUES AND ACTION PLAN

7.1 Introduction

The previous sections of this report describe the context and resources of tourism on the Mid Coast, and carry out a product analysis with the objective of identifying the most promising resource-based opportunities. Having done this, the next steps are to:

- review the important issues that affect Mid Coast tourism and will shape its future development; and,
- outline a tourism action plan to start developing the tourism opportunities identified herein.

The approach in this tourism action plan is to identify action items at three levels of detail, ranging from general to specific:

- the **product-based** recommendations focus on what steps are required on a product-by-product basis, for the outer and inner Mid Coast communities;
- the **regional action plan** addresses matters that affect all communities, such as marketing and product development;
- in the pre-feasibility analyses of Section 8, recommendations are made for developing three **specific opportunities** – a marine cruise and canopy walk at Roscoe Inlet, a hut to hut guided kayaking tour, and a road tour in the Bella Coola Valley.

This approach provides a variety of perspectives, and acknowledges that different readers have different interests. In addition, the opportunity-specific recommendations in Section 8 provide a framework for evaluating these three opportunities -- and any others -- that may be considered in the future.

7.2 Issues Overview

This project and other research have shown that there is a steadily growing global market for adventure and wilderness-related tourism products, and that the Mid Coast is well positioned to attract a share of this market. The key development challenges are to:

- identify and prepare the most promising products for the market;
- establish the local commitment to realize these opportunities;
- develop quality products that will be competitive with existing products offered both within and outside the Mid Coast; and,
- attract the financing and investment capital required for the development of suitable tourism opportunities.

The consultants have heard from numerous community stakeholders regarding their goals and objectives for the tourism sector on the Mid Coast. The key community challenges are to:

- develop adventure products in a manner that protects community values (ie., environmental and cultural) and maximizes community participation in terms of ownership and employment;
- retain a large proportion of the economic benefits of tourism development within the local communities;
- implement tourism development in a manner that is sustainable and that fits with overall community social and economic objectives; and,
- implement tourism development in a way that protects First Nations heritage and traditional use sites.

7.2.1 Issues Scan

General

Several key issues were brought to the attention of the project team through research, analysis or as direct input from community members and tourism industry professionals. The project team believes that these issues should be addressed in the course of product development planning -- whether undertaken by public or private interests -- if the Mid Coast is to build its tourism industry in a manner consistent with community and tourism industry needs. The following points raise some key tourism-related issues identified during this study.

- Most Mid Coast communities have identified tourism as a key future economic activity and are working on specific tourism initiatives. The communities recognize the utility of economic diversification into tourism, and have clearly expressed to the project team a desire to have tourism contribute to the local economy.
- Local residents, including those not directly employed by the tourism industry, need to show support towards tourism development. Some locals remain skeptical about the value of tourism and transmit a negative or indifferent attitude towards tourists. Communities need to be apprised of the merits of tourism and its positive economic impact on a region. Communities also need to have discussions to explore solutions to local concerns.
- To gain community support, tourism development should occur at a pace that is good for the community as well as the environment. Limits of acceptable change should be examined as part of any outdoor recreation-based tourism development proposal. Local residents maintain a strong sense of ownership or stewardship of the region's resources and wish to maintain a degree of control over how those resources are used. Residents and tourism operators are also concerned regarding the environmental impact of current and future beach use by tourism operators and the impacts on traditional food fishery areas.
- In the remote communities of the Mid Coast there is generally a lack of knowledge regarding how to access funding, and a scarcity of local mentors who have developed successful business ventures. To find entrepreneurs with the required knowledge and expertise, the Mid Coast communities, entrepreneurs, and/or economic development organizations may have to look outside the region, at least in the short term. Investors, entrepreneurs, educators or management staff from outside can bring valuable resources, experience and information that will help build a vibrant tourism industry, and contribute to a high level of quality and service. Shared values, good communication and a working relationship between entrepreneurs and the local community will be essential in ensuring that the benefits of new tourism ventures are realized locally.

- Several communities on the Mid Coast are presently developing or planning a range of tourism products. These communities should work collaboratively to develop connected and complementary products to offer the touring public. For example, several First Nations communities on the North Coast and Mid Coasts are either planning or developing traditional lodges as a tourism draw. Visitors to the Coast are likely to see heritage/cultural products as a “homogeneous” product, and the various communities may be forced to compete with each other for market share. However, by marketing cultural tourism jointly as a region, and presenting the various lodges as complementary products, the First Nations of the Coast will gain access to a larger market and reduce marketing costs. It will be important for competitive reasons to create a stronger regional "brand" and coordinate tourism activities to maximize on each others' strengths and opportunities.
- Some communities of the Mid Coast have identified poor local representation by government agencies and government bureaucracy as barriers to effectively moving tourism opportunities forward in a timely and efficient fashion. This has on occasion blocked investments or made it difficult to secure the necessary funding for tourism development.
- Further development of the products and the associated infrastructure (e.g., local accommodation, suppliers and equipment) is required before tourism products located outside the Bella Coola Valley and Shearwater can be marketed for the Mid Coast. It will be difficult to arrange financing, or attract investment, without demonstrating that the required infrastructure is present to support the tourism product. Moreover, tourism brokers and agents focus their efforts on products which are ready *now*, and not those which are still developing.
- This consideration is what is driving the Heiltsuk initiative to build a hotel in Bella Bella, in order to provide high quality accommodation and to serve as a jumping-off point for visitors to attractions such as the proposed canopy walk in Roscoe Inlet, or guided kayaking tours.
- The ferry service to the communities of the Mid Coast is critical to tourism development. Mid Coast communities are concerned that their interests are not sufficiently represented in the decision-making process for the Central Coast ferry service. Chronic uncertainty about future ferry service makes it difficult for local tourism businesses to plan and market themselves as a tourism destination area. For example, local tourism providers need to know the summer 2003 ferry schedule by Christmas 2002 in order to market at European and other trade shows for the following summer.
- Some of the products identified in this report will require a significant capital investment. Clearly, attracting this kind of capital will be a challenge. An investor will be seeking the best return on investment and minimal risk exposure. The investment decision will be influenced by factors such as the market for the product, the competition, the security of the land base, the location of the venture, and the entrepreneur's experience in the sector. Community and government support will be necessary to create a favourable investment climate.

First Nations Issues

Many of the foregoing concerns are shared by both First Nations and non-native communities alike. However, specific issues pertaining to First Nations interests arose during the course of the project. These are summarized below.

- In the past, commercial tourism operators have used, or infrastructure has been built on, First Nations cultural or traditional use sites without consulting the affected people, and this has created hard feelings on the part of First Nations.
- Most of the First Nations involved in this project are concerned that tourism development will continue to take place on their traditional lands without their involvement. Presently, there are several non-local operators who offer tours of the Mid Coast (primarily kayaking and nature observation). Many First Nation people see this as an unsolicited use of their traditional lands. There is also a feeling of being “scooped” by outsiders, as most First Nation people do not have the resources or information to build their own tourism products locally. This concern has been intensified by the advent of world attention on the Great Bear Rainforest. The First Nations people of the Mid Coast have indicated that they wish to control, or seek ways to be involved in, future tourism development in their region. First Nations want respect for their resources and land, and a protocol established for revenue-sharing for new tourism initiatives on their land.
- First Nations communities on the Mid Coast need to build capacity locally in order to capitalize on and participate in new tourism activities. Given that many of the local entrepreneurs in First Nations communities have traditionally focused on the fishing industry, they are still making the transition to tourism development. To date, there are still only a few locally established tourism operators with limited resources to develop opportunities.
- At the regional level, there is a long history of mistrust and a lack of coordination and cohesion that is probably causing real harm to tourism development in the region as a whole. There is a strong need for an empowered umbrella organization that can satisfy the participants that it is effective and representative of their interests.
- The Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Oweekeno and Gwasala First Nations are now considering the establishment of the Central Coast First Nations Tourism Consortium, in order to address the following matters:
 - maximizing tourism benefits to local communities;
 - managing growth, and the location of tourism;
 - working with non-First Nations tourism operators;
 - developing a protocol for First Nations and industry to explore partnership opportunities; and,
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- addressing a range of other tourism-related issues such as ferry service, marketing, resources and communications.
- Any consortium or regional organization representing First Nations should establish a working protocol to govern decision making and operations. Suggestions for the protocol include the following:¹
 - Each member of the Consortium should have equal representation.
 - A quorum structure should be established to ensure that all members are present and involved in the discussions. This may incur more costs, particularly when face-to-face meetings are necessary, but the approach has been successful in fostering harmony and a spirit of cooperation in other organizations.
- The Kitasoo/Xaixais have developed a Land Use Plan and Environmental Protocol for their Traditional Territory, completed in 2000. The Kitasoo/Xaixais expect all current and future users of their Traditional Territory, including tourism operators, to consult with the Community of Klemtu, Chiefs and Councils. The protocol indicates that operators must gain Kitasoo/Xaixais permission before any activities are carried out in their Traditional Territory. A protocol agreement must be developed between the Kitasoo/Xaixais and any operator, which provides meaningful benefit to Klemtu. The Kitasoo/Xaixais also expect users to adopt their land use plan and show respect for their people, government, environment and resources.
- As of April 4th, there is a General Protocol Agreement between the First Nations of the Central and North Coast, as well as the Haida Gwaii, and the provincial government. This will enable each of the First Nations to negotiate their own Interim Measures Agreement on land use planning with the provincial government.

7.3 Product Action Plan

The Tourism Opportunity Study for the Mid Coast Forest District has identified several specific tourism products with high development potential. The action plan, which has been developed from a community economic development perspective, outlines the preliminary steps that could be taken by communities, economic development agencies or entrepreneurs to advance the development of these products. Clearly, undertaking a tourism (or any other) business initiative involves many tasks – the objective of this plan is to identify the first steps required for each of the opportunities.

The recommendations for product development are made for the outer Mid Coast and the inner Mid Coast separately. Some product opportunities, of course, span both areas. It is also noted that steps for developing the heritage/culture product have been excluded from this action plan. Throughout this report, heritage/culture resources (both First Nations and non-native) have been identified as important and integral to most of the other products evaluated. In addressing the other tourism products, the following action plan also effectively covers heritage/culture without focusing on specific locations or sites. It lies within the

¹ Suggestions by Keith Hamilton, Bella Bella Community Development Society.

purview of all the Mid Coast communities to determine when and how they will choose to pursue the development of their heritage resources for tourism.

7.3.1 Outer Coast

Ocean kayaking

The best opportunities for ocean kayaking tours on the Mid Coast Forest District are located on the outer coast (Swindle Island, Bella Bella, Hakai, and at Namu and Dawsons Landing), Fiords and Lakes (Ellerslie Lake/ Roscoe Inlet), and Princess Royal Island (Butedale/Laredo and Cornwall Inlet) units. The outer coast is already frequented by some of the bigger kayaking guiding operations in BC. These companies typically operate from Vancouver Island or from mother ships and offer trips generally lasting from five to ten days in duration. There are also many independent kayakers who travel to the area on BC Ferries.

- **Objective:** To develop ocean kayaking venture(s) that would be based in and operated from local communities on the outer coast. These ventures would typically be guided, multi-day ocean kayaking trips that focused on accessing one or more of the specific areas identified in the resource analysis.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** Presently there is little infrastructure on the outer coast to support this industry. The Discovery Coast ferry service regularly serve the outer coast communities during the summer months, transporting many kayakers to and from North Vancouver Island. Kayakers visiting the Mid Coast either bring their own kayaks, or obtain them from rental shops on the North Island. There is nowhere on the outer Mid Coast to rent kayaks, or obtain guides or instructors. Most outer coast communities either have existing hut or lodge infrastructure that could be used to support multi-day excursions, or are now contemplating the development of this type of infrastructure.
- **Ancillary services:** The First Nation communities on the outer coast have minimal accommodation capacity locally, although each has one or two bed and breakfast operators, while in Shearwater there is a well-known lodge. A successful kayaking industry on the Mid Coast would draw more visitors for overnight stays and fuel the demand for more accommodation in these communities. It could also support a kayaking rental and supply store, and there may also be the potential to develop catering and food services in association with ocean kayaking operations.
- **Potential development tasks:** The communities of the outer coast are currently exploring the development of ocean kayaking ventures. It will be important for new kayaking operators to work closely with the local communities to ensure that cultural and traditional uses are protected. The Heiltsuk have hut infrastructure in place while other First Nation communities are exploring hut development or lodge development for their communities. This infrastructure could be critical in the eventual establishment of quality ocean kayaking ventures. Key tasks for developing an ocean kayaking venture are as follows.
 - Identify specific kayaking products to be developed, and potential entrepreneurs who would have an interest in developing venture.

- Engage in community discussions to identify issues and concerns for ocean kayaking development, and to work towards agreement on how the venture could operate locally.
- Work with the entrepreneur or proponent to develop a protocol for resource management, and ensuring that the venture will meet community economic, social and environmental objectives.
- Explore partnerships between the community and other local or regional entrepreneur(s) to identify shared opportunities such as connecting other resorts, lodges or hut systems to ocean kayaking ventures.
- Undertake a thorough market assessment to estimate how many clients could be expected in the first, and subsequent, years of operation.
- Produce a business plan for the local ocean kayaking venture as a prelude to obtaining financing.
- Consider collaboration and/or partnering with existing tourism operators in and outside the Mid Coast for marketing and logistical support.

Nature Observation

On the outer coast there is good potential for bear viewing opportunities on Princess Royal Island (particularly the rare Kermode Bear). The staging areas for nature viewing on Princess Royal Island would be Hartley Bay and Klemtu.

- **Objective:** To develop nature viewing venture(s) that would be based in and operated from either Klemtu and/or Hartley Bay. This activity would typically be a multi-day tour experience and could be linked to other tourism products such as ocean kayaking or marine cruising.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** The communities of Hartley Bay and Klemtu are currently exploring tourism products, however, there is currently little infrastructure in place. The community of Hartley Bay is now building a lodge in Cornwall Inlet on Princess Royal Island that could be used as a staging area for wildlife viewing activities.
- **Ancillary services:** Klemtu and Hartley Bay have minimal accommodation capacity locally but both communities are working to address this issue. There may be the opportunity to link other tourism products and local services to this venture.
- **Potential development tasks:** The communities of Klemtu and Hartley Bay are currently working on tourism product development associated with Princess Royal Island.

Marine Cruising

Marine cruising could take the form of multi-day or day circle tours and linear marine cruises. The best marine cruising opportunities on the outer coast are identified as:

- a linear cruise between Rivers Inlet, Koeye, Namu and Bella Bella;

- Fiordland multi-day pocket cruise from Bella Bella, Shearwater, and Ocean Falls; and
- Owikeno Lake multi-day cruising experience.

Currently there are approximately four operators (all based on Vancouver Island) offering a marine touring product on the Mid Coast, although several fishing charters offer this as a secondary activity locally.

- **Objective:** To develop marine cruising venture(s) that would be based in and operated from communities of the outer coast by local residents.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** There are underutilized boats in most of the coastal communities, some of which could be modified or upgraded to transport passengers. It may also be necessary to purchase boats. The type of vessels required will be determined by the distance and wind/water conditions. In addition to investing in boats and equipment, infrastructure would need to be developed or arranged by the entrepreneur to support the actual operation of a marine touring venture – e.g., docks or mooring buoys at the key locations. (Refer to the pre-feasibility analysis of a marine cruise and canopy walk at Roscoe Inlet in section 8.)
- **Ancillary services:** To successfully draw visitors to communities outside Bella Coola, good quality accommodation should be made available in the community, or else provided by the operator. Like the kayaking product, there would be the potential to develop catering and food services in association with marine cruise operations.
- **Potential development tasks:** These are similar to the steps outlined for ocean kayaking business development.

Destination Lodges

On the outer coast several areas have the potential to be developed as a destination lodges in connection to various adventure tourism activities. Some of the best outer coast opportunities for destination lodges include the following.

- Pruth Bay and North Calvert Island -- Presently there is a fishing lodge in the area, however the the opportunity would be for a lodge that emphasizes ocean kayaking, boating, and hiking.
- Roscoe Inlet – a lodge here could be linked to Heiltsuk First Nations culture and a variety of adventure tourism activities, including a possible tree canopy walk (See Section 8 for discussion of this product).
- Eucott and Nascall hot springs areas -- A lodge at these hot spring sites could be linked to numerous adventure tourism products, and a specialized spa.
- Owikeno Lake linked to Sheemahaut Hot spring could be linked to several adventure tourism products, First Nations cultural activities and a spa.

- Princess Royal Island in the Anchor Lake area -- The Hartley Bay community is developing a lodge in nearby Cornwall Inlet. However, the Anchor Lake area would provide opportunities such as steelhead fishing, First Nations cultural heritage and adventure tourism activities.
- The Koeye River Lodge situated on the mouth of the Koeye River, has recently been purchased by Warren and Peter Buffet, and ownership of the property will be transferred to the Heiltsuk.. Should the Heiltsuk choose to develop the lodge for tourism, it could be linked to products such as grizzly viewing and First Nations cultural heritage.

The development of a new destination lodge is typically expensive and requires careful assessment to determine its feasibility, and how it will fit into the community's overall tourism development.

- **Objective:** To develop a destination lodge(s) to support new or expanded adventure tour activities on the outer coast.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** There are several existing lodges on the outer coast, most notably the Shearwater Resort, the fishing lodge at Pruth Bay, and approximately ten fishing lodges in the Rivers Inlet area. These are accessible by boat or water plane. Each First Nation community on the outer coast is at a different stage with regard to considering or planning a destination lodge.
- **Ancillary services:** Very few adventure tourism products are presently offered by the communities of the outer coast. However, both the Heiltsuk and Kitsoo First Nations are both actively engaged in exploring the development of a variety of adventure tourism activities. As well, there are numerous established ocean kayaking and recreational fishing ventures currently operating in the area. As local entrepreneurs develop adventure tourism activities, the destination lodge could be used to support these activities. Proponents of new destination lodges may also want to forge partnerships with existing tourism operators in the area, and may want to consider the following community approaches.
- **Potential development tasks for Heiltsuk First Nations:** The Heiltsuk community is currently undertaking a feasibility assessment of constructing a lodge. The community and consulting team will outline their next steps once they have assessed its viability.
- **Potential development tasks for Kitsoo First Nations:** As the community of Klemtu explores and develops adventure tourism products, they will need to build the capacity for more visitor accommodation. Therefore, the community of Klemtu may want to consider the following tasks.
 - Determine what type of accommodation will best suit the needs of the clientele being targeted for the adventure products – are they comfortable with rustic accommodation and few amenities, or will they prefer full-service resort accommodation?
 - Determine the best strategic location for the accommodation or lodge, where it can maximize linkages to the largest number of tourism activities.

- Engage in community discussions to identify issues and concerns for lodge development, including models for ownership, and a protocol for working with and sharing revenue with outside investors or operators.
 - Explore partnerships between the proposed lodge and other local or regional entrepreneur(s) to identify shared operating and marketing opportunities.
 - Undertake feasibility assessment and business plan to ensure that the lodge venture is viable, and a good investment from the perspective of lending agencies or funding partners.
- **Potential development tasks for Oweekeno First Nations:** The community of Oweekeno may want to consider the following tasks.
 - Determine if there is community support for a destination lodge product.
 - If the community chooses to pursue a destination lodge, it should determine acceptable models for ownership and management of the lodge.
 - If private investment funds are required, identify investors or entrepreneurs who are willing to pursue the development of a lodge jointly with the community of Oweekeno.
 - Explore partnerships between the community and other local or regional entrepreneur(s) to identify shared opportunities such as connecting other resorts, lodges or hut systems to ocean kayaking ventures.
 - Undertake market assessment and business plan as a prelude to obtaining financing.

Hut-to-Hut

There are three areas on the outer coast identified with high opportunity for either marine or lake hut-to-hut systems. These are the marine area around the islands east of Bella Bella (Athlone to Campbell Island area); the Hakai Pass marine area (vicinity of Hunter Island); and Anchor Lake, Butedale Lake, and Canoona Lake area on Princess Royal Island.

- **Objective:** To develop hut-to-hut system(s) as a basis for various adventure tour activities (primarily ocean kayaking, nature observation, and marine cruising activities).
- **Status of Infrastructure:** The Heiltsuk First Nations have already constructed huts on the islands east of Bella Bella, primarily for community and traditional uses. These huts could also be used to support water-based adventure tours. Sites have been identified on the Hakai or Princess Royal Island sites, although Hartley Bay is developing a lodge in Cornwall Inlet on Princess Royal Island.
- **Ancillary services:** There is presently minimal accommodation capacity in the outer coast communities. As in the case of kayaking, a successful hut to hut tour industry on the Mid Coast would draw more visitors for overnight stays and fuel the demand for more accommodation in these communities. There may also be the potential to develop catering, food services and supply businesses in association with the hut product.

- **Potential development tasks for Heiltsuk:** The first steps towards developing the Heiltsuk system of huts are as follows. (Refer to Section 8, Pre-feasibility Assessment of Hut to Hut Ocean Kayaking Touring Around Bella Bella).
 - Determine if the Heiltsuk community supports the use of their hut system for tourism and if the huts are available often enough to support an adventure tourism operation.
 - Assess the type of tourism products that would be most compatible with the hut system, based on considerations such as time of availability, distance from communities, access to and from water, and amenities required.
 - Identify local/regional entrepreneurs or business operators who would want to pursue the development of this product.
 - Undertake a detailed business plan to outline the viability of the opportunity and secure financing if necessary. Financing may be required to construct additional huts.
- **Potential development tasks for Kitasoo:** These would be similar to those for the Heiltsuk, however the objective would be to establish a system of new huts.

Adventure

Adventure products appeal to enthusiastic recreationists seeking adrenaline experiences, and often require a high level of energy and fitness. On the outer coast, the only high opportunity activity is open water ocean kayaking, although there are low to moderate opportunities for rock climbing and mountaineering in the Fiords & Lakes, Channels and Princess Royal geographic units.

Open water ocean kayaking is presently carried out occasionally as part of the multi-day tours offered by some kayaking tour operators that operate on the outer coast. As it is highly dependent on wind and water conditions, open water ocean kayaking is difficult to plan for. Local knowledge about conditions and beaches is also essential for this form of kayaking. Thus, open water ocean kayaking in and of itself would likely not be the basis of a business. Existing and new kayaking operators can consider incorporating more of this activity into their tours if they wish to attract this market.

7.3.2 Inner Coast

Marine Cruising

On the inner coast a linear marine cruise could be established for the Dean and Burke channels. This area is surrounded by towering mountain ranges with rock outcroppings and bluffs that slope directly into the channel. As well, there are hot springs that are suitable for a “hot spring” marine cruise. This cruise could begin in Bella Coola and then travel to either Shearwater or Bella Bella.

- **Objective:** To develop marine cruising venture(s) that would be based in and operated from Bella Coola.

- **Status of Infrastructure:** Bella Coola has a harbour that can be used by both small and large vessels, and a good range of services nearby. There are likely some underutilized boats in or near Bella Coola that could be modified or upgraded to transport passengers, otherwise it would be necessary to purchase boats. The type of vessel to be used is determined by the distance and wind/water conditions. In addition to investing in boats and equipment, infrastructure may need to be developed or arranged by the entrepreneur to support the actual operation of a marine touring venture – e.g., docks or mooring buoys at the hot springs location, possible amenities for hot spring users.
- **Ancillary services:** There is a good array of accommodation and other services in Bella Coola. Part of the appeal of a marine cruise operation out of Bella Coola is the capacity for drawing more visitors to the downtown core and its harbour front. This points to longer term opportunities to develop supporting tourism attractions in Bella Coola, such as the river front, historical sites and the Nuxalk Village.
- **Potential development tasks:** The development steps of a marine cruising venture would be similar to those outlined under ocean kayaking.

Nature Observation

On the inner coast there is good potential for nature viewing opportunities in the Firvale area to the Anarko River and on the lower Kimsquit and Dean river areas. These areas have high grizzly bear viewing potential and a good diversity of other wildlife.

- **Objective:** To develop nature viewing venture(s) that would be based in and operated from the Bella Coola Valley. This activity would typically be associated with a multi-day experience and could be linked to other tourism products such as ocean kayaking or marine cruising.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** Most of key infrastructure for such nature viewing activities would be available in the Bella Coola. The entrepreneur would need to invest in some additional infrastructure to support the tours – e.g., vehicle or boat, possible viewing platform(s).
- **Ancillary services:** The Bella Coola Valley has a good range of services to support nature viewing ventures. The valley has a good range of accommodation, an airport in Hagensborg, and road and ferry access to ensure regular transportation links for travellers.
- **Potential development tasks:** The community of Bella Coola could initiate the development of nature observation tourism products. This would include the following tasks:
 - Select the most promising nature observation opportunities, and determine how they could be packaged to maximize their market potential.
 - Undertake feasibility assessment for the specific opportunity.
 - If the opportunity is viable, identify businesses or entrepreneurs that may want to capitalize on the opportunity. This would likely require preparing a prospectus on the opportunity.

- Assist the interested business through the tenure application process.

Road Touring

In the Bella Coola Valley there is only one paved road (Highway 20) and several unpaved roads that would be suitable for road touring. Road touring could be linked to other types of products on the inner coast such as nature observation, marine touring, air tours and/or cultural heritage. While there are presently no businesses that offer road tours of the Bella Coola Valley as a primary product, there are conventional bus tours that travel the Bella Coola Valley as part of longer trips, and several tour package operators (e.g., Natural Habitat Adventures and, in the past, Elder Hostel) who include local road tours as part of a multi-day nature observation experience.

- **Objective:** To develop road touring venture(s) that would be based in the Bella Coola Valley. These would be small, personalized tour groups of no more than six guests, using a minivan. The trips would generally be four to six hours in duration.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** Existing and required infrastructure for a road tour product is evaluated in detail in Section 8 of this report (Pre-feasibility assessment of a road tour product in the Bella Coola Valley).
- **Ancillary services:** The Bella Coola Valley has a range of accommodation services that could be utilized by a road touring venture. As well, there are several restaurants and bed & breakfast establishments that may be interested in providing catering services and arranged sit-down meals. Road tours of the Valley would provide visitors with more exposure to its features and amenities, and could stimulate demand in other, ancillary businesses in the Valley.
- **Potential development tasks:** These are outlined in detail in Section 8 of this report (Pre-feasibility assessment of a road tour product in the Bella Coola Valley).

Destination Lodges

Presently, the most notable destination lodges on the inner coast are Tweedsmuir Lodge in the Bella Coola Valley, and a fishing lodge at the Dean River. The best potential for a new destination lodge linked to adventure tourism product would likely be at Tallheo Hotsprings in South Bentinck Arm. This area has a small beach and is the site of an old Nuxalk village. This site would ideal for cultural interpretation and marine cruising. Tallheo Hotsprings is an important area for the Nuxalk First Nations and may be an opportunity they would want to explore. Clearly, this choice will be determined by the preferences of the Nuxalk.

The Tallheo Cannery, which has several completed rooms and boat access, also has the potential to be a destination lodge.

- **Objective:** To develop a destination lodge that would support new adventure tourism activities on the inner coast and provide a venue for cultural heritage interpretation.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** There is a range of accommodation and services in the Bella Coola Valley, and a bed and breakfast establishment at the Tallheo Cannery across North Bentinck Arm from Bella Coola. Bella Coola would serve as a good staging area for a destination lodge at Tallheo Hotsprings.
- **Ancillary services:** As the adventure tourism product diversifies on the inner coast, visitors will seek a variety of other tourism products and services. The new destination lodges may be able to forge partnerships with existing tourism operators in the area to support product providers and other local services.
- **Potential development tasks:** The Nuxalk First Nations may want to consider undertaking the following tasks:
 - Determine what type of accommodation will best suit the needs of the clientele being targeted for the related adventure products – are they comfortable with rustic accommodation and few amenities, or will they prefer full-service resort accommodation?
 - Engage in community discussions to identify issues and concerns for lodge development, including models for ownership, and a protocol for working with and sharing revenue with outside investors or operators.
 - Explore partnerships between the proposed lodge and other local or regional entrepreneur(s) to identify shared operating and marketing opportunities.
 - Undertake feasibility assessment and business plan to ensure that the lodge venture is viable, and a good investment from the perspective of lending agencies or funding partners.

Adventure

There are more opportunities for adventure activities on the inner coast than the outer coast, and most of these would be in the Bella Coola Valley. The most promising activities are rock climbing, mountaineering, mountain biking, multi-day backpacking, paragliding, and windsurfing. Heli-skiing (linked to the air tour product) may also hold potential. These activities would generate income and employment locally, while attracting a diverse and interesting young market, and could be the basis for a cluster of new businesses (supplies, rentals and instruction) in the Bella Coola Valley. This could contribute to the image of the Bella Coola Valley as an “extreme” destination.

- **Objective:** To establish a cluster of adventure activity-related businesses in the Bella Coola Valley.

- **Status of Infrastructure:** There are no sports specialty stores or rental establishments for these activities in the Bella Coola Valley. Those seeking opportunities to climb, hike, cycle or do other activities are required to bring their own equipment from outside the area.
- **Ancillary Services:** The Bella Coola Valley has a good range of services to support visitors seeking adventure experiences. The valley has a good range of accommodation, an airport in Hagensborg, and road and ferry access to ensure regular transportation links for travellers.
- **Development Tasks:** To develop an adventure product business, proponents must be thoroughly familiar with the resource, and take a realistic look at how it rates compared to similar resources elsewhere. The results of this report indicate that the 350 km land portion of the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail holds particularly high potential for long distance mountain biking, and backpacking. In all likelihood, this feature would present the best starting point for building a business around extreme activities. Key tasks for development include the following.
 - Work with locals or other experts from outside the region (e.g., local paragliders, owners of paragliding schools, the Canadian Alpine Association, long distance cycling clubs) to identify which activities are the most promising and could compete with similar products offered elsewhere. If the winds in North Bentinck Arm are good for windsurfing, but not as reliable as those in the Gorge (Oregon) or Squamish, then it could be difficult to attract the critical mass of windsurfers needed to support a business. Heli-skiing (addressed in this report under the “air tour” product), and backpacking on the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail both merit a close look.
 - Once the most promising activity or activities are selected, learn which market to target, using published information and working with informed sources, such as sports associations or clubs.
 - Seek out potential entrepreneurs who would have an interest in developing ventures in these adventure activities.
 - Work with entrepreneur(s) to define and develop product(s).
 - Once the market is identified and the product(s) developed, seek opportunities such as print media, trade shows or events, and the internet to highlight not only the product, but the appeal of Bella Coola Valley.
 - Produce a business plan for the venture as a prelude to obtaining financing.
 - Consider collaboration and/or partnering with existing tourism operators in and outside the Mid Coast for marketing and logistical support.

Air Touring

There are six air transportation companies that are either based or have operations on the Mid Coast. Three companies are fixed winged and three operate helicopter charters. All of the air tour operators in the Mid Coast depend on a range of clients which includes industrial use, general transportation, emergency use and tourism. The air service sector on the Mid Coast has been described as competitive, and with the recent land use determinations in the Mid Coast it is anticipated that industrial use of air services by the forest sector will decline.

- **Objective:** To develop an air touring strategy and marketing approach to support the growth of air touring opportunities among the existing air transportation companies.
- **Status of Infrastructure:** There are airports at Hagensborg and Bella Bella, and a paved landing strip at Shearwater. Oweekeno has an unpaved, seasonally used land strip. The other communities are accessible by float plane
- **Ancillary services:** Accommodation, services, supplies and fuel are available at Bella Coola and Bella Bella. There is a more limited array of services in the smaller communities of the outer coast, although fuel is generally available at most of them.
- **Development tasks:** The community of Bella Coola might want to consider tasks to support the growth of air touring locally, including the following.
 - Determine the interest among the air transportation companies to become more involved in air touring activities and the overall tourism sector. Heli-skiing merits close consideration.
 - If the air transportation companies are interested, undertake a market assessment of the type of air touring products that would appeal to visitors coming to the Mid Coast.
 - Explore the packaging of air touring products with other local adventure tour activities on the Mid Coast. Helicopter operators should work with heli-skiing proponents to determine this product's feasibility.
 - Develop a marketing strategy or participate with existing tourism marketing efforts locally to raise the profile of local air touring operators and highlight specific air touring activities.

7.4 Regional Strategy

While there are specific tourism opportunities that each community may want to consider developing it is important to be aware that tourism operator face many challenges, including:

- complexity of developing, marketing and operating the product;
- changing customer expectations;
- stiff competition;
- rising costs; and
- a growing need to be a player in the global market.

This points to the need for communities to seek better ways to initiate and help build tourism businesses. Two essential strategies for communities on the remote Mid Coast are collaboration both within and outside the region, and keeping fully informed about the market and the competition.

There are sound reasons for communities and tourism operators to work together, and to seek partnership with each other and with related stakeholders. First, operators do not work in a vacuum. Their businesses are

located in an area where there are many overlapping interests and concerns -- by First Nations, other tourism operators, communities, government agencies, industrial operators, and environmental interests. Tourism operators – or communities advocating tourism expansion -- can best represent their collective interests in this context as a group, effectively gaining a voice in the decisions about issues such as future ferry schedule service, regional economic development initiatives, or land use decisions.

By working together, communities and tourism operators on the Mid Coast can market their products under a single image, or “brand”. This will enable them to market their products as complementary products, and minimize local or regional in-fighting for market share. A regional marketing image will also reach a larger market. To illustrate this, consider which has more cachet in the international tourism market – citing a specific Mid Coast kayaking or road tour product, or invoking the image of the Great Bear Rainforest?

Finally, by working together, Mid Coast tourism operators can reduce some of their costs, and create new sources for marketing their products. All operators face some similar challenges in starting up and sustaining their businesses. In this section, we have therefore outlined a regional approach that could be adopted by communities to advance tourism growth.

7.4.1 Developing Strategic Partnerships

Communities should explore ways to **collaborate and connect their resources** to share in product development, assist with making regional linkages to support tourism development, and resolve issues that they all face with regards to tourism development.

Explore **relationships with communities** adjacent to the Mid Coast Forest District on Vancouver Island and the North Coast to investigate ways to leverage marketing focus and support each other in complementary product development.

Provincial Partnership²

The Ontario Ski Resort Association has developed an operational partnership, which provides members with a joint insurance program for liability and property insurance. The key partners are the OSRA and 50 of its members, an insurance agent and an insurance broker.

Through the formation of this partnership, the industry has developed risk management programs, standardized waiver language and signage at resorts and has reduced members' risk from a litigation point of view.

- Cultivate solid working relationships with all levels of government to create a climate that will attract investment and foster the timely development of tourism products on the Mid Coast. It is proposed that responsibility and resources be defined to **undertake liaison activities** between government agencies and the local tourism and community interests in order to:
 - educate and inform regulatory agencies of tourism development priorities in the region;

² KPMG Management Consulting (April 1995), *Developing Business Opportunities Through Partnering: A Handbook for Canada's Tourism Industry*. Prepared for Industry Canada – Tourism.

- develop a local understanding of regulatory agencies' requirements, and an understanding of the appropriate processes for new development from the point of municipal, provincial, and federal perspectives; and,
- educate funding agencies as to the activities and priorities of the local tourism sector. This will assist funding agencies with a traditional focus of participation in fishery, forestry and other primary resource-based initiatives to become more comfortable with the process of tourism development. It may also allow them to be more proactive in their participation in community development.

7.4.2 Tourism Business and Product Development

- Support the development of local tourism sector opportunities by establishing a group of **business mentors and regional financial experts** to advise on the issues and requirements of securing financing and business development. Securing financing for entrepreneurs who wish to initiate tourism businesses will be challenging. Many traditional lending institutions do not like to lend to ventures located in remote areas of British Columbia. The local mentors and financial experts could:
 - consider the merits of establishing a local Community Venture Capital Corporation (through the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers) which could further increase the access to capital for tourism related businesses;
 - provide contacts and insights for entrepreneurs developing business plans;
 - assist with developing a network of venture capital avenues and alternative financing opportunities for tourism businesses;
 - educate local financial agencies as to the potential and opportunities within the local tourism sector and work towards informing the financial community around issues of perceived and real risks in the tourism sector; and,
 - explore the development of lending circles to support tourism business start-up.
- Work with agencies such as the Bella Coola Community Futures Development Corporation, the Central Coast Regional District, and the Bella Bella Community Development Society to ensure **up-to-date and accessible tourism information** is in place to support local tourism business development. This resource should be available in one place, such as the local economic development or Community Futures office. For example, there are many sources of tourism market data such as research done by the Canadian Tourism Commission. To access this as an individual can be very time consuming. However, by ensuring it is in one place locally and periodically updated, it would enable businesses to get the best data possible for key business decisions.
- Work towards identifying and developing a **code of ethics** for tourism operators involved with the various product areas offered in the region. Provincial standards and standards developed by industry associations in other jurisdictions should provide excellent guidance to these efforts. Locally SuperHost has been offered several times, however, efforts should be considered to make sure the Mid Coast begins to develop high standards and promotes itself as a provincial leader in this area.

Create a Group: Be guided by its Values and Direction³

Tours Innu is a native receptive tour operator in Quebec, specializing in ethnocultural tourism, developed by The Societe Touristique Innu. The society is a non-profit organization founded in 1991, and responsible for the development of tourism in several aboriginal nations in Quebec. It aims to offer an authentic quality tourism product during four seasons, focusing on authenticity, nature and culture. This society is actually a membership organization of the native groups, councils and businesses, themselves. They spent several years researching interest in aboriginal product at national and international travel forums before developing Tours Innu.

The society has developed standards for its operators, and all members have to be approved. They have a training program for native personnel, and a strict accreditation system for service providers. These standards provide a guarantee that all trips will involve a certain quality, security and personal respect. They have extensive list of safety and quality criteria.

Standards include: hospitality; environment; aesthetics (inside and outside); noise pollution; emissions standards; non-polluting energy sources; no trace use and camping; water use and grey water disposal; sewage; and infrastructure standards.

- Establish a task force to explore the opportunities and disadvantages for local operators to develop **joint ventures and partnerships** with larger tourism companies from outside the region. Many tourism opportunities require specialized skills, experience with specific market networks and significant capital investment that may not be available within the region. Local resources should be identified to guide exploration of the potential for joint ventures with larger more experienced ventures from outside the region.
- Identify and deliver specific **training** support, including:
 - coordination of needs and service delivery – e.g., if several communities require a certain kind of training (e.g., guiding or kayaking tours), they could jointly arrange to share a training session or course in order to minimize costs;
 - leveraging federal and provincial government resources to undertake training – this will involve staying fully informed about new sources of funds and how they are delivered;
 - supporting local delivery of training, especially in the smaller communities; and
 - implementing activities and projects – e.g. pilot projects, initiating local programs to disseminate and teach cultural interpretation.

Several post-secondary institutions in BC now offer a range of adventure tourism programming. As well, educators at these institutions provide their services locally on a variety of training courses and workshops that range from risk management, ocean kayak training, to interpretation skills and techniques. For example, educators at the University College of the Cariboo are working with individuals in the community of Klemtu on developing ocean kayaking expertise.

³ Pam Wight and Associates (March 1999), *Catalogue of Exemplary Practices in Adventure Travel and Ecotourism*. Prepared for the Canadian Tourism Commission.

Many of the workshops and courses have been developed in cooperation with the various adventure tourism associations in the province. However, these courses are typically offered at full cost recovery and this can deter some individuals and communities from readily accessing such programs in smaller numbers.

7.4.3 Ensuring Effective and Efficient Marketing

- Focus on **regional marketing and explore the development of a regional image** by undertaking group marketing of the unique features of the Mid Coast. Tourism proponents can create an image that will raise the profile of the region to compete with other global destinations that feature wilderness and outdoor experiences. Recent media coverage of the Great Bear Rainforest has already been instrumental in raising global awareness of the intrinsic value of the Mid Coast. This could prove to be a good jumping off point for future regional marketing efforts.
- Explore approaches to coordinating and developing additional resources for marketing efforts. The Mid Coast with its small population base is at a disadvantage when it comes to marketing resources – this means the communities must work together. Resources will be more efficiently and effectively utilized by:
 - leveraging regional marketing funding from funding agencies and surrounding organizations through developing partnerships and strategic alliances to pool resources for the area;
 - ensuring packaging of complementary products – tourism packaging and marketing of tourism packages are closely tied, and assist operators to combine their efforts where they have common goals;
 - liaising with other communities, tourism organizations, and stakeholders to coordinate the targeting of tourism resources at trade shows and other marketing events; and,
 - consistently making an effort to communicate with media outlets, tourism magazines, and major tourism operators, agencies and brokers to increase market exposure for tourism at minimal cost.
- The Mid Coast tourism sector can, and should, use the media, internet and other networks to publicize or announce key events and experiences that make it such a special place. This could include:
 - the 50th anniversary of the completion of The Hill;
 - the herring catch on the outer coast – this could be a feature article in Canadian or international magazines about the harvest of and market for herring roe;
 - special wilderness experiences such as major fish runs, or Grizzly/Kermode Bear viewing experience; or,
 - music festivals, rodeos or artistic/cultural events.

A Vancouver-based film producer is presently working with long-time resident Al Elsey of Anahim Lake to produce a documentary film about the history of The Hill, with the story chronology spanning the history of the first native inhabitants, the trade routes, and the construction of the road, to today. Shooting is expected to begin in the summer of 2002. The broadcasting of the proposed six-part documentary could coincide with the anniversary of The Hill's completion. If broadcast, this documentary could be instrumental in educating more Canadians about the Mid Coast and drawing more attention to the region.

- Establish a visible tourism information centre in Bella Coola, the hub of ferry and vehicle traffic during the summer months. Visitors arrive at Bella Coola after a long trip by ferry or car, often late in the day or early in the morning. Many are unable to find out about the attractions in Bella Coola or elsewhere on the Mid Coast, or are unmotivated to do so on their own. If they can obtain information from an attractive and well-marked visitor information centre, many will be inclined to explore the region more, and *stay longer*.
- Find ways to attract more ferry arrivals. This will include erecting larger signs at the Bella Coola ferry terminal, and ensuring that a hotel is open for early morning arrivals.
- Consider marketing the Mid Coast as an extreme destination. Due to its remoteness, the Mid Coast is still regarded as a well-kept secret in terms of what it has to offer. While many BC and US residents know about driving The Hill and its perils, they know little about what lies at the other end of Highway 20. Tourism proponents on the Mid Coast have a chance to capitalize on this mystery by marketing its remoteness, its dramatic wilderness, and its opportunities for adrenaline experiences. Most adventure products are not, in and of themselves, highly profitable, but they do attract a diverse and interesting market with disposable income. If a small number of adventure tour operators were to become successfully established in a Mid Coast community, they could contribute to the image of the Mid Coast, as an extreme destination for certain types of activities (analogous to Fernie and Rossland for skiing, and Moab, Utah for mountain bikers). This could draw a new and unique market to the Mid Coast, and enhance its cachet in the provincial and international market.

Launch of the Tourism Industry's Most Innovative Website

Montréal, March 28, 2001 – Québec Resorts/Hôtellerie Champêtre, a network of 24 inns and hotels located in Quebec, announces the launch of its website www.hotelleriechampetre.com. Designed using creative, leading-edge technology, the site offers visitors a number of options, such as an intranet and an Extranet, interactive information, online booking, the ability to subscribe to an electronic newsletter and monthly contests. This new site is intended for travellers, tour operators, and members from the hotel and inn industry, and provides over 250 individual and group packages for all seasons.

The site is a rapidly expanding network of Quebec's tourism industry members. It has the goal of better reaching its customers, travellers, travel organizers and other associations. As a gateway to more than 24 inns and hotels in Quebec, the QuébecResorts/Hôtellerie Champêtre site offers its online clientele several individual and group packages for each of Quebec's four fabulous seasons, along with exciting online deals.

Each page of information is updated regularly. Visitors to the site can arrange business meetings or conferences online, find information using an interactive approach, secure online bookings, find seasonal specials, or purchase gift certificates for relatives, friends or valued employees. Visitors may also subscribe to an electronic tourism newsletter, access recipes by great chefs, view a road map to better locate the inn or hotel, and peruse media summaries of the services offered by the members of the Québec Resorts/Hôtellerie Champêtre network.

A powerful marketing management tool, thanks to the Intranet portion of the Québec Resorts/Hôtellerie Champêtre website, building customer profiles, customizing offers and continually updating packages, promotions, online deals, electronic newsletters, recipes, contests, news, road maps, media summaries and image databases is as easy as 1-2-3. The immediacy and relevance of the information found on the site make for a powerful marketing management tool and a powerful research tool for anyone wishing to arrange a vacation or a business meeting at one of the 24 inns and hotels belonging to the network.

By using the site's Extranet service, each of the 24 network members can manage and update packages, promotions, online deals, recipes and news, both quickly and independently, without the need for outside help of any kind. The information contained on the Website is constantly updated, making it the most relevant tool for every visitor interested in any of the Québec Resorts/Hôtellerie Champêtre network's hotels and inns.



Fish Egg Inlet: photo by Warren Fox