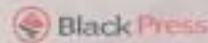


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NK'MIP DESERT CULTURAL CENTRE

Explore the heritage of the Okanagan people

Deep in the heart of B.C.'s wine country and Canada's only desert is a place where the stories of the Okanagan First Nations people are told through the eyes of people other than themselves.

The \$10-million, 8,500-square-foot Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre on the Osoyoos hillside is part of a huge tourist and business development that includes Nk'Mip Cellars and restaurant, the ever-expanding luxury Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa and the new, nine-hole Sonora Dunes Golf Course. The views of Osoyoos Lake from here are stunning. It's a testament to how Osoyoos Indian Band Chief Clarence Louie has successfully put the band's assets to work.

The ecologically-sensitive, rammed-earth cultural centre is a long, low structure that is complemented by two kilometres of trails. In this award-winning facility is an authentic "Voices of the Past" reproduction of a pit house, "Coyote Spirit" Chapak Theatre, First Nations art and gift boutique, and "Critter Corner" live desert reptiles exhibit.

Outdoors are incredible wildlife sculptures and a replica of an aboriginal village. A popular rattlesnake interpretive program works to preserve the area's endangered species.

Interpreters like Osoyoos band member Bob Etienne conducts inspiring tours of the site, explaining the rich heritage of the Okanagan people. Also part of the centre's mission is to conserve and interpret Canada's only desert, an extension of the Sonoran, which stretches up from Mexico.

Visitors can learn about Osoyoos' rare and sacred Spotted Lake that is mineral-rich and is said to have special healing qualities. Patrons can marvel at the cultural renaissance that took place at the InkamEEP day school in the 1930s and 1940s inspired by an eccentric Irish teacher.

IF YOU GO: Click on www.nkmipdesert.com or call toll-free at 1-888-445-8555. The centre is located at 100 Rancher Creek Road, at the end of 45th Street in Osoyoos. To contact Spirit Ridge, click on www.spiritridge.ca.



MIKE HANKE/BLACK PRESS

Above: Interpreter Bob Etienne shares Okanagan First Nations stories at Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre near Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa in Osoyoos. At left: Centre sculpture by Washington artist Virgil 'Smoker' Merchand. Below: Spirit Ridge resort vineyard with Osoyoos Lake in the background. Bottom Left: Desert centre's outdoor interpretive displays reflect the rich native culture.



LESTER E. GIERACH/CONTINUED

The Columbia Icefields are an impressive sight when seen from an airplane.

COLUMBIAN ICEFIELDS

Flying and cycling to the Columbia Icefields

BY LESTER E. GIERACH
NewsLeader Contributor

Cindy and I would both tell a little different story recounting our travel through the Rocky Mountains. We noticed different things because we are different people, but here is how I am telling the story.

One of our mountain-top experiences was seeing the mountains and glacial lakes from a six-seater Cessna aircraft. We were stunned by those Columbia icefields with their many crevasses and blue-green glaciers.

From 11,000 feet we could clearly see the North Saskatchewan river draining the Saskatchewan Glacier. The glacier appeared to be a mammoth-sized white tongue sticking out from the face of Mount Andromeda (elevation 3,430 meters).

Nearby is Mount Athabasca, almost as

high, and the glacier nearby is almost as impressive.

The pilot, sitting next to me in the cockpit, points northward to a towering, cone peak in the distance.

"That's Mt. Robson," he says matter-of-factly, "tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies."

I checked later and found he was correct because that mountain really is about 13,000 feet tall. On this day, I note in my log book that the peak is about 25 per cent covered by a wisp of cloud.

The pilot of the five-seat, single-engine, single propeller Cessna seems pretty young to us. But the booking agent has assured us that the pilot has more than 100 hours flying experience, implying that therefore

Please see ICEFIELDS on A17