

Thetis Island Field Trip by Linda Schroeder
 "all photos by Linda Schroeder unless noted"

In early June the club held a multi-day field trip to Thetis Island, BC. Thetis is one of the Southern Gulf Islands, just off the east coast of Vancouver Island. We stayed at Cedar Beach, a B&B owned and run by Andy and Virginia Lamb. The B&B has beachfront property at the southeast corner of the island.

On Saturday, June 2nd, Bert Bartleson took off at the break of dawn from Olympia and met me at my house in Whatcom County. After we transferred his luggage to my car, we headed north over the border for Tsawwassen where we would catch the ferry to Nanaimo. From Nanaimo we then headed south to Chemainus to catch another ferry to Thetis Is. Once there, it



Cedar Beach B&B as seen from the water by kayak



George Holm photo

Andy and Virginia Lamb – cooking us a seafood feast

was just a 5 minute drive to the B&B.

It was quickly apparent that Virginia and Andy were wonderful hosts. They showed us around the house and yard, kayak shed, sauna and hot tub, or "thermal recovery unit" as the divers call it. All were available for us to use. We were also very well fed on our trip. Virginia is an excellent cook and spoiled us rotten. We definitely gained a couple pounds by the time we left.



A Pileated Woodpecker, a rare treat to see in the yard, and a male Rufous Hummingbird at the feeder

They had numerous bird feeders in their yard which attract a multitude of bird species. Bird books and binoculars were available to identify what we saw. Bert is a birding enthusiast and he had brought along his spotting scope, so we really got some close-up views of some birds. By the end of the trip he had identified 30 different species, nearly all of them just in the Lamb's yard. The hummingbird feeder was a particular attraction as there would be upwards of two dozen birds vying for space. The feeder was less than two feet from the living room window and you could watch the little birds, up close and personal.



A First Nation's clam garden

The first full day we were there, we explored the beach right in front of the house. It's a mostly sand/mud beach with scattered boulders. A nearby point of land consists of layered sandstone which reaches out into the water like fingers. The most interesting feature of these rocky outcrops was that it was recently determined that one section was a clam garden, which would have been created and



Andy and Bert exploring near the end of the clam garden



Odostomid snails parasitizing a *Tresus capax*



Howard and Bert digging for live clams, George and Linda in the background



A shore crab seeks its revenge on Bert for being disturbed!

maintained by the Salish tribes of the area. Clam gardens were very recently rediscovered - this form of mariculture is no longer practiced. One of our own members, Dr. Kirsten Rowell, is part of the group studying the gardens, so it was very interesting to see one for ourselves.

Andy enthusiastically showed us his beach and would point out particular creatures he frequently found there. His beach is primarily populated by bivalve species, but there were a few gastropods and chitons. The sandstone doesn't provide a very stable surface so there were few barnacles or diverse algae clinging to them to provide good gastropod habitat. We also saw many sea stars, crabs and shrimps, and Andy identified the fish species for us.

One great find was a live *Tresus capax* (Gould, 1850) which had washed up on top of the sand and whose siphon was parasitized by odostomid snails. The snails are tentatively identified as *Evalea tenuisculpta* (Carpenter, 1864). An article on this relationship was just published two issues ago in *The Dredgings*, Vol. 52 No. 2, pg 3. Bert counted 15 of the snails on the clam's siphon and the majority of them are being sent to those doing the research mentioned in the article.

On our second day, Bert and I ventured to the north point of the island, called Pilkey Point. This area is made up of large rock outcroppings with a few small sand/mud beaches between the outcroppings. It was the only beach day where we were rained on so we had to deck out in full

rain gear. Fortunately we never got more than some light sprinkles, but it was windy at this spot so the extra layer of rain gear was welcome. The Point was very wave-swept and steep so the mollusk diversity was much less than at the protected cove at the other end of the island. We did find more chitons here, including one we rarely see, *Mopalia sinuata* Carpenter, 1864. Andy came along and went diving off the point. He brought up some subtidal creatures for us to see. Two of the most interesting species he found were the Heart Crab, *Phyllolithodes papillosus* Brandt, 1848, and a large Rainbow Nudibranch, *Dendronotus iris* (Cooper, 1863).



A Heart Crab Andy brought up during his dive

Shortly after we returned from the beach on the second day, Irene and Howard Bergh arrived. They are new members and have just joined the club this winter. They had been planning a vacation to Vancouver Island and were excited to be able to join the field trip. While they are interested beachgoers, they are relatively new at identifying what they see and were very excited to learn anything we could teach them. We will look forward to seeing them at future meetings.

For our third beach day we not only had the Berghs along, but George Holm and Zoe joined us for the day. We returned to the beach in front of the house this day so we

could show them the clam garden and other interesting things we had found. We also had plans to do some clam digging to find live specimens of some of the species we usually only see as dead shells. I was eager to photograph the siphons of these species. Bert and Howard were successful in finding most of them.

On our last day, after we'd all packed up to leave, we headed for the beach by



Howard, Zoe, George, Bert, Linda and Irene

the ferry dock. We'd intended to explore that beach for a few hours but it became obvious there wasn't that much to see there. Instead of waiting for a later ferry, we decided to get on the next available one and look at a beach in Chemainus. George had taken some interesting photos of things he'd seen at the Chemainus ferry dock, so we thought we'd go there. But as I was looking for a place to park, I spotted a sign for public beach access down the street so decided to check it out. We came upon Kinsman Beach Park, which turned out to be a rocky spit with a large tidal flat behind it. While not a terribly diverse beach, it held some interest and we found some nice specimens of some shells which had been rare on the previous beaches. It also has one of the largest sand dollar beds I'd ever seen.



The river otters suddenly realized they were being watched and all turned to look at once.

We partook of activities other than beachcombing during our trip also. I visited a small farmer's market on Sunday. That afternoon Andy showed us a trail to a viewpoint on the island and we had a pleasant hike up to it. In the evenings at high tide, the water in the cove was mirror calm and irresistible for kayaking. I went a couple of times and Howard came along on the second excursion. We spent a lot of time just watching the birds and discussing what we had seen on the beach in the mornings. River otters live in the area and we often saw them out in the water. One evening we were treated to the sight of seven of them cavorting up on the lawn like a bunch of rambunctious puppies. Andy said he had never before seen that many all at once on the lawn.

It was a fantastic trip. We noted 54 mollusk species among the visited beaches. We made new friends, saw new things, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The trip came to an end too soon.