



Left: Cycling is a great way to see the island; Right: The Chrome Island Lighthouse.

We push our bikes onto the small car-ferry and enjoy the 10-minute crossing from an already sleepy island to an even sleepier one.

Denman is an easy cycle tour. Once you get past the first hill, that is. A steep, sweaty climb up Denman Road leads to the bluffs that so characterize coastal islands such as this. Don't be afraid to push your bike. We've all been there. Just get out of the way of the vehicle traffic; most are rushing to make the Denman-Hornby ferry on the other side of the island and honking will ruin your vibe.

A diminutive community is perched atop the hill—home to essentially the only services on the island, beyond some B&B's, artisan shops and a few boutique operators. Denman General Store is our first stop for snacks. Denman Craft Shop and Abraxas Books & Gifts are also worthy visits. Denman Island Café Pourium and the Earth Club Factory Bistro are just around the corner, on Denman Road, but lunch makes a better finish than a start.

The street is carless once we turn our bikes south on Lacon Road, an ever-so-slightly downhill jaunt that treats with peekaboo ocean vistas and dense coastal rainforest of redcedar, Douglas-fir and the occasional arbutus. On the inland side, hobby farms appear in the woods—Denman attracts those looking for a relaxed way of life, when even Van Isle communities like Courtenay and Qualicum Beach are too hustle-bustle. As such, the vibe is mellow to the point of comatose. Just the way locals like it. But it's also eclectic—proof is Chateau Beaufort Noble Wines, an unlikely vineyard thriving on this Northern Gulf Island. We ogle the funky property as ▶

DENMAN ISLAND

An often-overlooked Northern Gulf Island that offers an idyllic day of cycling

BY DAVID WEBB

LONG, THIN, DENSELY forested and often skipped over for the whitesand beaches of Hornby Island, Denman is a gem. As part of the Northern Gulf Islands, it runs for 19 kilometres along the east coast of Vancouver Island, between the hamlets of Bowser and Union Bay. At times, its proximity to Van Isle seems almost swimmable, but it's best to board a BC Ferries sailing at Buckley Bay. Uniquely, this is the world's longest cable ferry, running up to 15 times daily between Buckley Bay on the big island and a small ferry dock on the little. Denman has many charms, though

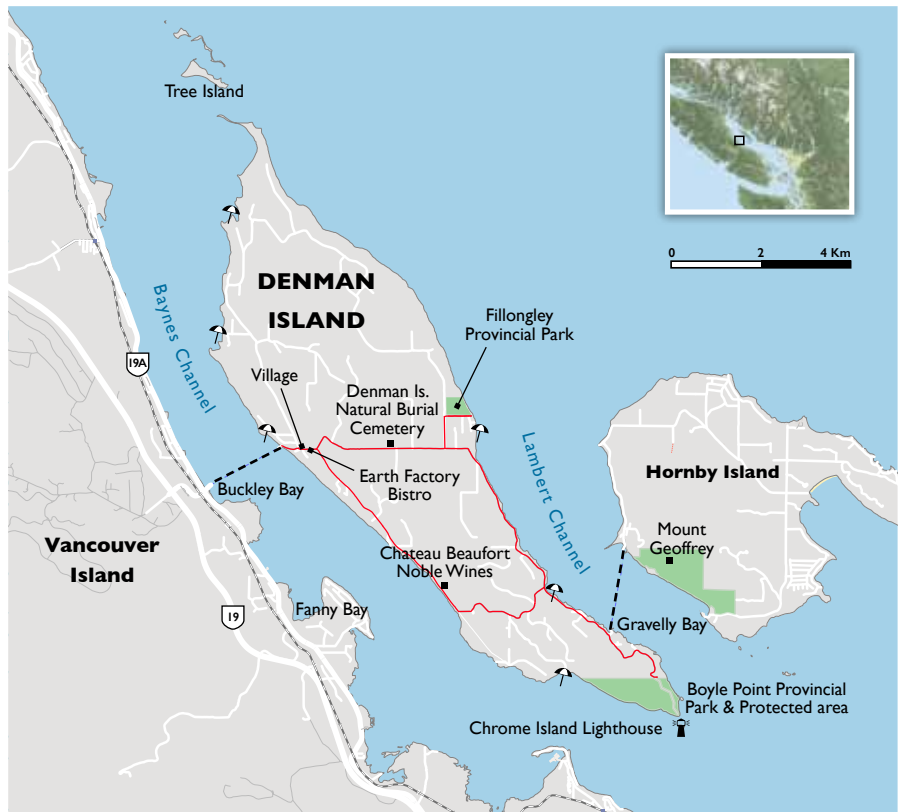
for the day-tripper it's perhaps best exploited as a pleasant and accessible bicycle tour.

My wife, Erin, and I park our car alongside Vancouver Island's Highway 19A, what locals dub "the Old Island Highway," after an inland route was cut through the rainforest in the late 1990s. The twin roads represent a split personality on the Island—the fastest highway in Canada, with a speed limit as high as 120 km/h, runs parallel to arguably one of the slowest, an often-two lane oceanside route that meanders past quiet towns and tempts tourists with pullouts and sea-views. It's a taste of what's to come on Denman.

we approach McFarlane Road, which leads us over a hump and to the east side of Denman Island. (Later, on the last leg, we'll pass Denman Island Natural Burial Cemetery, the first modern cemetery in Canada to go sans-coffin, sans-gravestone... basically, you're wormfood. It's reserved for residents of Denman who wish to return to their beloved land. Like I said—eclectic.)

On the east side, the aptly named E Road traces the coast; we opt first for the route south, as it passes waterfront homes and a picturesque acreage with horses prancing around evergreens. This is a dead-end route, leading to the Hornby ferry and Boyle Point Provincial Park and Protected Area. Boyle Point occupies the southern terminus of Denman. It's a 52-hectare user-maintained park offering prime viewing of California and Stellar sea lions, bald eagles and Chrome Island Lighthouse—a lightstation set on a protruding islet practically a stone's throw from the tip of Denman. But don't throw stones—as one of the last manned lighthouses on the coast, Keeper Roger Williamson and his wife, Leslie, likely won't appreciate it.

Back on E Road, we pedal along what seems to be yet another mild downhill slope, barely requiring more than the occasional revolution to keep pace. Rocky beaches below the bluff give way to emerald Lambert Channel and next-door Hornby Island, marked by protruding Mount Geoffrey. A half-dozen-or-so kilometres later, we turn left on Denman Road, then swing right onto Swan Road for a rest at Fillongley Provincial Park, a beach of iron-grey sand with a panoramic view of the channel and Hornby. We'll need our strength. The last leg up Denman Road is a 100-metre-high hill rivalled in steepness only by the immediate route from



the ferry dock. The apex can't come soon enough—poor Erin rides a three-speed cruiser while I shift into the lowest of my 24 gears to make things a touch easier.

Just when we're about to cry mercy, the uphill grind turns to a speedy cruise that would lead us all the way back to the ferry, if we weren't stopping for a vegetarian lunch at the Earth Factory Bistro beforehand.

Twenty-eight kilometres of easy riding, \$25 in ferry fares, lunch al fresco and a dozen Fanny Bay oysters for dinner—picked up at the Buckley Bay ferry terminal—equals one memorable day trip on idyllic Denman Island. 🍷



Park your car at Buckley Bay and roll your bicycle onto the BC Ferries cable-ferry, the *Baynes Sound Connector*. For \$12.50, you'll get return passage for yourself and your bike. (A vehicle and driver is about \$35.) bcferries.com

Discover more information about Denman Island: denmanisland.com



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