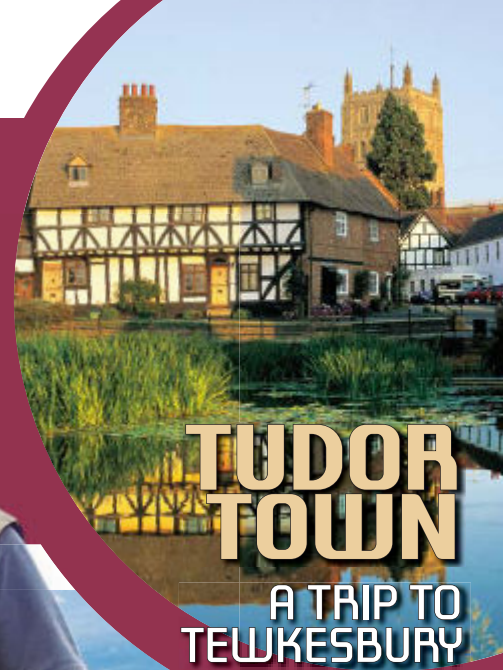




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captivating CANADA

As the scene of some of the world's most spectacular natural wonders, British Columbia is a paradise for lovers of the outdoors, as CHRIS DAY found out.

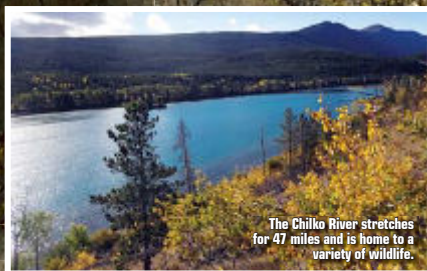
Let me tell you why a trip to British Columbia should be on your bucket list. The diversity of the land here is second to none, with vast scenery to feast your eyes on and abundant wildlife, including the elusive grizzly bear. If you are looking for a true equestrian adventure then exploring the mountains, wide open ranges, moss-carpeted rainforests and sapphire blue lakes and rivers from the back of a sure-footed horse is for you.

There are different spectacles throughout the year - spring brings sunflowers, roses and aspen buds and is a fresh but wonderful time to ride in the valley - you can also still spy the snow-capped mountains, which adds to the magic. Mountain wildflowers come out in July, and then the berries start to ripen in August, along with the beginning of the sockeye

salmon run which brings a host of wildlife into the valley. The Indian summer is also outstanding, with autumnal hues seen from late September before winter sets in.

I visited the Tsylos Provincial Park in September, and the promise of a magical fall season did not disappoint. Less than a one-hour flight from Vancouver via light aircraft, before you have even landed in British Columbia you will have spied the views of the spectacular Coastal Mountain Range. We had clear skies, which made the 45-minute journey go very quickly. On arrival, we saw the north end of the stunning 52 mile long Chilko Lake - and for me the magic had already set in.

ON ARRIVAL, WE SAW THE NORTH END OF THE STUNNING 52 MILE LONG CHILKO LAKE - AND FOR ME THE MAGIC HAD ALREADY SET IN.



The Chilko River stretches for 47 miles and is home to a variety of wildlife.



The party make their way along the river, eyes peeled for bears.

A HIDDEN GEM

Tsylos Provincial Park is at the north end of the Lake where the Coastal Mountain Range and the Chilcotin Plateau meet. The Park is approximately 233,000 hectares of rugged mountains, clear blue lakes, Alpine meadows and waterfalls - it is like being in a spectacular fantasy movie with sights that you can't even begin to imagine until you are there. The Chilcotin Plateau is wild, remote and fairly isolated, meaning that it is largely undisturbed by human activity. Imagine a land of log cabins and wood smoke where the time zone appears to be slower than anywhere else in the world, and the coffee pots are never empty! This describes the rare gem that is Chilcotin, and nestled amongst the rich vegetation and tree-studded scenery is Tsylos Park Lodge.

Established as a fishing and hunting lodge in 1957 by Bud and Corinne McLean, the Tsylos Park Lodge has been passed down the generations and is now owned by their youngest daughter Karen McLean.

My first tip when planning a trip to Tsylos is to never be without your camera - the photography opportunities are endless.

INTO THE SADDLE

Having settled into our rooms, and devoured a lunch of homemade macaroni cheese, we talked about our riding capabilities before being fully briefed down at the barn prior to our introductory ride. The briefing was very thorough, as you are encouraged to muck in at Tsylos - which means catching your horse, putting on the halter, tying up to the hitching rail, brushing off and tacking up. I met my steed Joe, who was very tall, and we rode for around one and a half hours before heading back to the lodge in time to freshen up for pre-dinner nibbles and a splendid meal of wild sea trout, salad, potatoes and asparagus, all washed down with nice Canadian wines.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Everything at Tsylos is authentic. The cosy and relaxing accommodation looks over the Chilko River Valley and while it's the image of the perfect wilderness log lodge, it also offers mod cons such as a Jacuzzi and fully stocked bar. Breakfasts are a highlight, with the option of the Canadian hot breakfast of bacon and eggs, fresh potatoes and pancakes, or a lighter selection of fresh fruit, cereal and yoghurt. After our first

Chris Day takes in the breathtaking scenery.



Left:
The old miners' cabin at Spectacular Lake.

Right:
Chris fell in love with the stunning scenery of British Columbia.

Below:
Chris' favourite breakfast of Eggs Benedict.

breakfast, we soon headed off on a different route to the day before, following the road for a while and then on to Green Lake, which was a beautiful stopping place for lunch. On the way back to the Lodge we diverted down a track for a lovely canter before heading back to enjoy some down time – some guests had a beer on the deck, while others headed for the hot tub to unwind.

The next day started superbly with a splendid breakfast of French toast and bacon. We headed out on the mountain ride. This ride is all at a walk due to the terrain but that doesn't make it any less enjoyable! We started to climb immediately after we left the lodge and there were some very scenic bits, but also a lot of riding in the trees. It got very steep at times and we stopped to rest the horses on several occasions but by 1pm we reached the top of the mountain and enjoyed our lunch looking over the spectacular Chilko Lake – it was the most magnificent view and well worth the hike. Of course what goes up must come down, so we began the descent carefully and by 4.30pm arrived back at the lodge for a well-deserved drink and delicious roast chicken dinner.

FINDING OUR FEET

The horses had one rest day during my stay, which meant we could head out to explore the area on foot. After a delicious breakfast of pancakes, sausages and maple syrup of course, we all headed out in the boat to Chilko Lake. It was an amazing day with some incredible views, and the mountain scenery is really stunning. After about an hour we stopped and walked to a small lake often frequented by moose, and



I WAS QUITE SAD TO SEE THE MOUNTAINS DISAPPEARING INTO THE DISTANCE - I ABSOLUTELY LOVED EVERY MOMENT OF MY TRIP.



'Mother and cub (above) watch the group go by at Lake Chilko, while a tree along the trail (right) shows the marks of bear claws.



then moved on down an inlet to an old miners' cabin and a quaint beach spot where we lit a fire and had hot drinks and lunch. After lunch we travelled up the lake to a spot where we could walk to 'Spectacular Lake' and it definitely lived up to its name! As we headed back we finally saw bears. A mother and cub running along the shore (well, they were eating fish until we came along), and then a little further along there was a mother and two cubs running up the scree into some trees. It was amazing.

THE FINAL FEW DAYS

It was great to be back in the saddle the next day and we had some lovely canters through the trees with some interesting switchbacks – you really had to be in tune with your horse. We rode back to the abandoned lodge where we saw the mother and cubs the day before, as one of the ladies had dropped her sunglasses. When we got there, we found a group of photographers totally absorbed in photographing the mother bear and her cubs as they sat in the river eating the abundant salmon. We tried to be very quiet and were able to watch the bears for a while, before she spotted one of our dogs, let out a snort and disappeared. After lunch we had some more canters and opened up for some faster pace on

the old airfield and also in a beautiful open paddock. Back at the lodge there was a mother and two cubs just down by the jetty. We dashed down and spent a long time watching them from just 50 yards away. What a sight!

Our last riding day took us through the trees and out onto the ridge which was great, if you don't mind heights. We crossed the river for lunch and had some nice canters along the sandy trails before we reached the river. Here we un-tacked the horses and the tack was taken back to the lodge by boat. We waited with the horses until our guides returned, which involved lots of hilarity and singing very loud songs to keep the bears away, then the horses swam across the river and made their own way back to the stables! That evening we enjoyed a delicious barbecue with steaks cooked to perfection; it was a bit of a party atmosphere with us all recounting our adventures from the week. It was the perfect last night of my trip.

As I left Tsylos the next morning I was quite sad to see the mountains disappearing into the distance. I absolutely loved every moment of my trip and with various options available it would fulfil the dreams of the most adventurous of riders.

If you are inspired to experience the magic of British Columbia by horseback, visit thesaddle.com for more information.



Once the ride was finished, the horses swam home by themselves.