

What Makes Denman Special?

It's mid-August as I sit down to write this. Blackberry season. Go-to-the-lake-or-beach season. There are shooting stars at night, and from dawn to dusk the sun reminds us why it has long been considered a deity in many cultures.

Usually, I fill this space with news of meetings, bylaws, applications, contentious community discussions, musings on democracy, and various other Islands Trust complexities. But this month I'm going to write about what makes Denman Island special.

It's not just the hot summer weather that's prompting me to lighten up. In fact, I am still on-task. At the heart of the Islands Trust, our one-of-a-kind regional and local governing structure, is our mandate: to *preserve and protect this area and its unique amenities and environment*. It's essential for us to slow down now and then to identify and appreciate these 'unique amenities.'

I recently put a call out on Denman's Facebook bulletin boards, asking people what makes Denman special. This fun exercise was actually part of a Trust-wide initiative that includes visioning, revisiting our policy statement (the closest thing to a manifesto we have), and asking Islanders what is in their hearts and minds as they consider where they live and how it is governed.

Here is the question I posed: "Denmanites, do you know any fun, quirky, remarkable, noteworthy, eyebrow-raising, or otherwise interesting facts about Denman?" The Islands Trust is creating a "state of the islands" report and wants to enliven this with fun facts about all the islands."

And here are some of the results from Facebook denizens, as well as myself and Trustee David Critchley:

The Graffiti Fence – for over two decades this fence along Denman Road, originally put up as a safety barrier on top on an old sandstone quarry, has been used by Islanders to advertise events, make political statements, and express their quirkiness, creativity and vision.

The Denman Island Natural Burial Cemetery – opened in October 2015, this is the first exclusively green cemetery in Canada.

The only known breeding habitat of the Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly, which was previously thought to be extirpated in North America until discovered on Denman. Denman Island Conservancy helped co-ordinate a captive breeding program and the enhancement/protection of habitat.

Our ferry – it's the world's longest marine cable ferry, for better or worse, and the only one on the BC coast.

Herring – Denman Island is at the geographical centre of the Salish Sea's annual herring spawn in early March. The waters turn turquoise as thousands of herring release eggs and milt, drawing not just a human fishery but also a host of sea lions, seals, eagles, gulls, herons and other sea birds and mammals.

Community Christmas dinners at the Hall, including a visit from Santa with presents for the kids – served free-of-charge to all comers for over 25 years. Usually over 300 people attend and the whole thing is provided by volunteers.

Pre-contact history – the island was home to the Pentlatch people and was known as 'Inner Island.' There were, according to estimates, four Pentlatch villages, including one on what is now named "Denman Point." European settlers visiting in 1862 after the indigenous population had been decimated by smallpox described remnants of a settlement that included totem poles and massive cedar house frames.

More surface water than any other island in the Trust, including two freshwater lakes.

The golf course – in a sheep-field, as informal and non-commercial as golf can get.

Mama meals – for over 15 years, whenever a baby is born, community volunteers take turns cooking and delivering dinners every night for several weeks.

Apples – a huge number of locally-grown varieties and a long apple-growing history.

People also noted our freestore, beaches, eagles, vibrant arts and music culture, strong creative feminists, dark skies, two local newspapers, old stone quarry, and plethora of public spaces. And I feel compelled to pay tribute to the precious and rare Douglas Fir coastal forest, and the magnificent Salish Sea marine ecosystem. Even though they are not unique to Denman and thus don't fit the criteria of my original question, they are at the heart of all that we love on our island.

It's been a pleasure to contemplate the things that make Denman special. Thanks to everyone who took the time to participate.