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Travel

E-MAIL: newroom@vernonmorningstar.com

A weekend in Whistler

COLLEEN FRIESE

Special To The Morning Star

B.C. - The odds of having a great Whistler weekend increase exponentially if you start by sabraging off the top of a champagne bottle in the Bearfoot Bistro's wine cellar. And if you end that evening in a Pan Pacific Mountside suite after multiple courses of divine tastes and velvety glasses of red wine at the aforementioned Bearfoot Bistro, especially after four chilly tastings in the minus 32 Celsius Vodka Room...well...life's all right.

It all started innocently enough. I was wandering about shoulder-season activities at Whistler. The truth is, Whistler doesn't really have a shoulder season. There is a ridiculous list of year-round activities. What I was really after was something unusual.

So, Except for the super hardcore, it was no longer ski season. And, since neither my husband Kevin nor I were into the killer downhill mountain bike riding, that too, was out of the running. We could, of



Jon Fathom displays some Inukshuks to visitors checking out Whistler.

course, go golfing and that would have been fine, but golfing had sort of been done. Plus, I wanted things that were new to both of us. And, with my 55th birthday rapidly approaching, it was time to shift gears a little, to shake up our usual conversations.

Luckily, after the evening at Bearfoot Bistro, our first activity didn't start until 10 a.m. and Jon Fathom proved to be just the ticket. He

owns the Fathom Stone Art Gallery and Studio and, after some great instructions, we were free to carve our own soapstone Inukshuks. Although it was fairly low-key, with my slightly shaky hands, there could have been the potential for a mishap. Because, as we all know, hijinks like the previous evening can so often lead to tears.

My husband, the man who last did an

art project in elementary school, sketched his Inukshuk on the blackboard, then drew it again on the soapstone and carved and cut and sanded up a storm.

We were both so engrossed in our mini-sculptures that we barely had time to grab lunch and get to Vincent and Cheryl Massey's gallery to do some weaving.

Weaving? I know. I know.

But here's the deal. First off, their gallery and home is hippie-heaven-gorgeous; they're lovely people (he's an amazing potter) and plaiting strips of wet cedar bark turned out to be a pretty darned cool thing to do.

Let's not forget the act of weaving is probably deeply embedded in our African ancestral roots. Once again, time left the building while we chatted and wove and admired the parade of braiding the cedar lengths into two little coasters.

Two, I might add, very very cool cedar coasters.

Exhausted by our artistic endeavors, we opted for an early night at the Dubh Linn Gate Restaurant. We shared a heaping pile of starters. Almost everything is made in-house with

ents. My favourite was the little platter of local amaranth and home-made pickles.

On Sunday, we shifted our focus to the great outdoors. We started off with a hike with a naturalist from Whistler Eco-Tours, top-rated ski-instructor and general all-round-ridiculously-interesting, Jeannie. We hiked to Cheakamus Lake as she shared the names and some characteristics of the indigenous plants. Years ago, I'd learned some of the basic names of B.C. flora, but Jeannie was naming stuff that I swear I'd never even seen before.

Next up was another Whistler Eco-Tour. This time the plan was to paddle the River of Golden Dreams — about the coolest name for any river. Ever.

Wind at our backs, we quickly left Alta Lake behind and entered the River of Golden Dreams, a narrow passage festooned with sunny-yellow lilies and low-hanging trees. Meanwhile, thunder bashed the mountains.

When we pulled into Green Lake, we got a real good look behind us. What we saw was an ominous black cloud matched with increasing thunder. Our guide Chris radioed the van's driver, we exited the canoes and, in a few quick minutes, we were delivered back to our car at the Pan Pacific for the drive home to Vancouver. The heavens opened up just as we left the hotel.

Now, each morning my coffee mug rests on a very groovy artisan cedar coaster. Our Inukshuks beckon from their perch on the bookshelves where they point the way back to Whistler.

If this is what freedom 55 looks like - I think I'm going to be all right.

Colleen Friese is with Travel Writers'

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