

Cave into a winter adventure

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Adventurers enjoy the secrets of Horne Lake Caves.

photo contributed

Climb a subterranean waterfall in the morning, strap on the snowshoes in the afternoon and then relax with a scotch by a warm crackling fire in the evening.

Horne Lake Caverns

"Where else will you get to do things like climb up an underground waterfall and see rare crystal rock formations without being some hardcore National Geographic adventurer?" says Richard Varela, manager of Island Pacific Adventures, the company that leads tours in Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park.

The three hour Wet and Wild Spelunking Adventure tour, available in winter and spring only, focuses on the ice age water forces that created one of the largest and most spectacular karst systems in North America.

"When you are standing in the caves yelling over the roaring, splashing water, it adds weight to the description of the tons of water from the melting ice ages that bore right through the mountains to carve these caves," says Varela.

Interest in caving has grown in recent years along with the growth of adventure and eco-tourism. People are attracted to both the physical and mental challenges in caving, as well as the sense of exploration and discovery found in going into the unknown.

Anyone with a moderate fitness level and aged eight years or older can participate in the tour.

Whether it's snakes from Indiana Jones, horcruxes from Harry Potter, or the predatory cave dwellers from The Cave, Hollywood loves to show cavern lurking creatures. The worst things you might find in the Horne Lake Caves in winter are

Daddy-Long-Legs (harvestman) who come inside the cave entrances to hibernate. So no bats, rats, snakes or flesh-eating monsters – just fascinating rock formations.

“Riverbend is probably Canada’s best decorated cave in terms of its crystal formations,” says Varela. “It is festooned with crystals.”

Some unique formations have been affectionately named after characters which they resemble, such as Jabba the Hut, Piglet, Winnie the Pooh, Howling Wolf and Smiling Buddha.

Out of 123 of the longest and deepest caves in North America, 76 are on Vancouver Island. Riverbend is 387 metres (1270 feet) long and features a seven-story waterfall.

For those that prefer their adventure above ground, the Horne Lake Campground & Outdoor Centre is open year-round. And the lake is stocked with cutthroat and rainbow trout for excellent fishing, especially in fall and spring. Island Pacific Adventures offers canoe, kayak and fishing gear rental throughout the winter.

It’s a rare opportunity when Mother Earth invites us deep into her home and the caves at Horne Lake remain for the most part undeveloped and in their natural state. They have no permanent lighting or man-made walkways.

Recently, they were named the Best Natural Outdoor Site in B.C. by Attractions Canada.

Few wild places in the world are left unseen or unexplored, and even fewer still are accessible without a lot of expense and equipment. Horne Lake Caves are within easy reach and offer a uniquely west coast wet and wild winter adventure.

For information or reservations, phone 250-757-8687 or 250-248-7829, e-mail info@hornelake.com, or visit the website www.hornelake.com.