



## Merritt Visitor Information @ Baillie House

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### **Executive Summary**

This report is for the first quarter of 2020. For the first time in 15 years, the Visitor Centre has had to be closed due to the Covid-19 epidemic. The last day that we were open was March 14<sup>th</sup>. Over this 2 1/2 month period, the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House had 2,477 visitors stop at our site. This represented a 40.1% decrease over the number of visitors in 2019. There has been a noticeable lack of overseas travelers over this period as the news of the Covid-19 epidemic became worse each week in other countries.

As soon as the weather warms up, all buildings on the Baillie property will be painted at no cost to the City of Merritt.

### **Dates and Hours of Operation**

For the January, February and March of 2020 the Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House was open for a total of 312 hours. This is a reduction of about 60 hours when compared to other years. We were open 5 days/week (Tuesday to Saturday) from 10 am to 4 pm. Even on statutory holidays, the hours that the VIB was open did not change.

Beginning on March 17<sup>th</sup>, the manager put a message on the Visitor Centre answering machine with her home phone number included. Four calls were received resulting in one package sent by Canada Post and one email response.

### **Staffing**

The Visitor Information Booth was staffed by Sandy Curnow, the on-site manager For 4 days each week, with a part-time employee working every Tuesday. Volunteers were also in the Visitor Information Booth on Fridays and Saturdays.

The Nicola Valley Heritage Society provided 312 man-hours of employment over this 2 1/2-month period.

### **Visitor Statistics**

Visitor Stats First Quarter 2020 vs First Quarter 2019						
	January 2020	February 2020	March 2020	First Quarter Total 2020	First Quarter Total 2019	% Difference - / +
Visitor Parties	624	817	381	1,822	2,499	-27.1%
Visitors	822	1,119	536	2,477	4,134	-40.1%
Tour Buses	0	0	0	0	0	

Each month of this quarter saw a decrease in visitors stopping at the Merritt Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House. This was at least partially due to the developing Covid-19 virus in other countries. I believe that some people had already begun to change their travel plans early on in the year.

The majority of visitors over this 3-month period were from B.C. Visitor Origin was distributed as follows:

B.C.	66%
Alberta	22%
Asia/Australia	4%
Rest of Canada	4%
Europe	2%
U.S.	2%

The majority of the visitors were only in Merritt for part of a day:

Same day	90%
One night	9%
2 nights or more	1%

The majority of visitors utilized our site facilities:

Site Facilities (washroom, food, etc)	41%
Food/Beverage	18%
Maps/directions	14%
Shopping	10%
Attractions	6%
Transportation	5%
Adventure Recreation	2%
Community Services	2%
Events	1%
Investment/Moving	1%

This year more visitors stopped to ask about restaurants than in other years. Many people that said they were only here for a couple of hours still wanted to know about hiking/walking trails and what else there was to do in Merritt for a couple of hours in the afternoon. The new hiking trail map is popular even in the winter (especially when the snow around town was very low).

Because we are open on Saturdays throughout the winter, visitors that are in Merritt for hockey tournaments and curling bonspiels are also able to ask us questions about what Merritt has to offer.

During the recent Centennials try-outs, many families came in to ask about what Merritt has to offer for their hockey players.

### **Trends in Visitor Traffic**

The majority of visitors to our site were from B.C. with a few visitors from Alberta most days. The number of Asian and European visitors coming into the Visitor Centre decreased this year when compared to 2019. Most visitors are just stopping for a part of one day. Hopefully if the visitors that come downtown will explore and see what Merritt has to offer other than fast food restaurants. Visitors regularly ask about local food and eateries.



### **Building, Grounds and Stakeholder Relations**

- Grounds have been cleaned up for spring been trimmed and so have the trees in the yard. All of the grounds work was completed by volunteers.
- Posters are put in the front windows of the VIB to publicize upcoming events for any groups that drop posters at our site. Some of these groups include the Nicola Valley Naturalists, Head Start program, Film Society, Community Garden, Catholic Women's League and Trinity United Church.
- The Merritt VIB/Heritage Society has purchased advertising in the Merritt guide, Gold Country guide and Stock Car Association Calendar.

### **Looking Ahead to the Next Quarter**

During the next quarter, the Nicola Valley Heritage Society will be hiring 2 summer students. They will begin working once the "stay at home" mandate has been lifted. They will complete the new Visitor Information Counsellor training course as soon as they begin work. We will continue to answer email and phone queries as they occur.

All of the buildings on the Baillie property will be painted as soon as the weather warms up. The Heritage Society will be using a grant from Heritage BC to pay for some of this work. The remainder has been fundraised by the Society.

The Heritage Society staff and volunteers are looking forward to meeting the challenge of continuing to host the Merritt Visitor Centre. We hope to see more visitors stopping at our downtown businesses to shop and eat.

Upcoming Events:

- Garden Festival (end of May hopefully)