



## Merritt Visitor Information @ Baillie House

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### Executive Summary

This report is for the second quarter of 2020. The Merritt Visitor at the Baillie House was closed for the months of April and May. The Visitor Centre was able to reopen on June 4<sup>th</sup> with all COVID-19 safety protocols in place. Barriers have been installed in the Visitor Centre. Also all staff members are wearing face coverings when indoors, our volunteers are all elderly so we are not having them inside the Visitor Centre. A few are still helping outside. As a result we have hired 4 summer students this year.

The Visitor Centre and the barn were painted this spring at a cost of \$6,573.00. This is partially paid for by a grant with the remainder of the money raised by the Heritage Society.

Our Mothers' Day Tea and Garden Festival were cancelled this year. The on-going sale of vintage items, souvenirs and flea market reopened in June. The Heritage Society had no fund-raising income in April and May. The Visitor Centre was broken into over the closure period. The alarm scared the intruder away.

### Dates and Hours of Operation

For the months of April and May of 2020 the Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House was closed due to the COVID-19 virus. Beginning on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the Visitor Centre reopened for 8 hours each day (from 9 am to 5 pm). We were open 5 days every week. From June 23<sup>rd</sup> on, the Visitor Centre has been open every day as enough staff has been hired to man the Visitor Centre for 7 days per week.

During April and May, the manager worked at least 10 hours per week to answer phone calls, emails and mail out packages of information when requested. The manager also put her phone number on the answering machine message so potential visitors could call at any time for information.

### **Staffing**

The Visitor Information Booth was staffed by Sandy Curnow, the on-site manager during April and May. Beginning in June 2 staff members returned to work at the beginning of the month (one year round employee and one returning summer student). By June 20<sup>th</sup>, 3 more summer students had been hired.

The Nicola Valley Heritage Society provided 63 person-days of employment on site and 90 hours of employment in April and May.

### **Visitor Statistics**

Visitor Stats Second Quarter 2020 vs Second Quarter 2019						
	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Second Quarter Total 2020	Second Quarter Total 2019	% Difference - / +
Visitor Parties			1,055	1,055	4,794	n/a
Visitors	0	0	1,548	1,548	8,747	n/a
Tour Buses	0	0	0	0	0	

During April and May, the manager answered 53 phone calls and 68 emails. The vast majority of the questions were from British Columbians and Albertans asking questions about camping (mostly about forestry campgrounds which were closed during the COVID-19 shutdown) and fishing day trips.

Since things have reopened, campgrounds have been overflowing with visitors from BC and Alberta. At the end of June, the park operator at Kentucky and Alleyne Lake called to tell us not to send any more people there as they had hundreds of cars in their overflow area. At nearby Bluey Lake, there are 6 campsites. The same weekend there were over 50 parties camping at the small lake.

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

B.C.	90%
Alberta	5%
Rest of Canada	4%
California	1%

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

Same day	76%
One night	15%
2 nights or more	9%

The majority of visitors utilized our site facilities:

Site Facilities (washroom, food, etc)	41%
Shopping	23%
Maps/directions	13%
Adventure Recreation	10%
Attractions	6%
Food/Beverage	4%
Accommodation	1%
Community Services	1%
Investment/Moving	1%

These numbers reflect an increase in questions about Adventure Recreation (mainly camping, fishing and hiking), shopping, directions when compared to previous years. Although most of the visitors only stayed in town for part of a day, the majority were in the Nicola Valley for a longer period of time.

Many of the visitors had not been to downtown Merritt before so this is the reason for the increase in questions about shopping (mainly for groceries). Community Services are mainly regarding sani-dumps and electric car charging.

### **Trends in Visitor Traffic**

The majority of visitors to our site were from B.C. with a few visitors from Alberta most days. We have had reports that many attractions and accommodations in Banff and Jasper are still closed. Visitors to those cities have had to sleep in their cars some nights. This could be why there is such an interest in the lakes in our area. Most visitors are just stopping in town for a part of one day but are spending their time camping in the Nicola Valley at provincial parks or forestry campgrounds (which reopened on June 1<sup>st</sup>). We have heard that many campers ignored the barriers at forestry campgrounds during April and May and continued to camp in our area.

Downtown Merritt was very quiet during April and May. When staff or volunteers were on-site during these months **very few** people stopped by as British Columbians kept their distance from each other.

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

- Brick edging was put around all of the flower beds during April and May (at a cost of \$325)
- The Visitor Centre and the barn on the Baillie property were painted during May and June at a total cost of \$6,573.00
- A rock (likely from a car) broke one of the front windows of the Visitor Centre
- The Merritt VIB/Heritage Society has purchased advertising in the Merritt guide, Gold Country guide.
- The Merritt Visitor Centre will have a 20 second spot on a very large television screen at Boston Pizza for the next year. Hopefully this will help to bring more visitors to downtown Merritt.

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

The Merritt Visitor Centre will be open every day of the next quarter of 2020. It will be staffed each day of July and August by one supervisor and at least 2 summer students. The students will be trained to become Visitor Information Counsellors.

We will continue to limit the number of volunteers to keep them safe as they are all in their 70's and 80's. At this time we do not feel that it is safe for them to be inside the Visitor Information Centre.

### **Costs to operate over the April and May of 2020**

Manager's hours	\$3,150.00
Advertising (pro-rated)	\$ 200.00
Garden brick edging	\$ 325.00
Repair to window of VC	\$ 125.00
Postage	\$ 42.00
Insurance (pro-rated)	\$ 260.00
Internet and phone	\$ 250.00
Hydro	\$ 250.00
Heating	\$ 400.00
Security	<u>\$ 180.00</u>
TOTAL	\$5,182.00
Costs for operating in June*	<u>\$4,344.43</u>
TOTAL PAYABLE THIS QUARTER	\$9,526.43

\*Based on yearly payments divided by 12 months

This represents a savings to the City of Merritt of \$3,506.87.

In June, the costs of COVID-19 safety supplies purchased was \$920.00. A separate summary of these costs is attached as Destination BC will be giving a grant to the City of up to \$1000 for COVID assistance.

Barriers/sneeze guards	\$370.00
Hand sanitizer/masks	\$350.00
Extra cleaning/sanitizing supplies	<u>\$200.00</u>
TOTAL estimated for remainder of 2020	\$920.00