



## Merritt Visitor Information @ Baillie House

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### Executive Summary

This report is for the third quarter of 2020.

Overall, there were 10,335 visitors that stopped at the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House during this 3-month period. This was a 24.0% decrease when compared to the number of visitors in 2019. Every week over this quarter seemed to have more visitors stopping in Merritt and British Columbians began to travel again. The Heritage Society was able to hire 4 summer students to help cover all of the hours that we were open. Once again, there were few volunteers on site due to their age and the risks of contracting Covid-19.

Most of the visitors to our area were from B.C. with some Albertans every day. Visitors generally stayed only a part of one day in town but many were interested in all of the outdoor activities offered in our area. Camping and hiking were popular information requests.

### Dates and Hours of Operation

For the months of July, August and September of 2020 the Visitor Information Centre at the Baillie House was open 7 days every week for 8 hours per day (from 9 am to 5 pm). The Visitor Centre was open for all 3 of the statutory holidays that occurred during this quarter.

## Staffing

The Visitor Information Booth was staffed by Sandy Curnow, the on-site manager for 3 days each week. The assistant manager worked 4 days per week. The Heritage Society hired 4 summer students to complete staffing requirements over the summer. We had to hire 4 summer students to make up for the lack of volunteers as the Board felt that it was not safe for our largely elderly volunteers to help in the Visitor Centre. Also, we are limited to 4 people in the Visitor Centre at one time (including staff and volunteers) which severely reduced volunteer opportunities.

With the help of the students, there were 3 staff members working every day in July and August. After the Labour Day weekend, we reduced staffing to just one person per day (the manager or assistant manager) with one volunteer helping at lunch but remaining outside the door of the Visitor Centre.

## Visitor Statistics

Visitor Stats Third Quarter 2020 vs Second Quarter 2019						
	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020	Third Quarter Total 2020	Third Quarter Total 2019	% Difference - / +
Visitor Parties	1,761	2,363	1,893	6,017	6,649	-9.5%
Visitors	3,244	3,933	3,158	10,335	13,591	-24.0%
Tour Buses	0	0	0	0	0	

Beginning at the end of June and continuing in July and August, each week was busier than the last as B.C. reopened over the summer and people were encouraged to travel within their own province. Visitors were generally very polite...many wore masks (including their children) and everyone used the hand sanitizer without being asked to. In September, there was a story on CBC television regarding Canadian snowbirds. It said that they were coming to B.C. for the winter instead of going to Florida. It seemed like we suddenly had a lot of mature tourists who had checked Merritt out on-line and came looking for more information from us. They were more well-informed than the usual tourists and knew quite a bit about Merritt already. Most were from Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and were going to be in the Thompson-Okanagan for a couple of weeks.

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

B.C.	74%
Alberta	21%
Rest of Canada	5%

There were virtually no visitors from outside of Canada.

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

Same day	78%
One night	15%
2 nights or more	7%

The majority of visitors utilized our site facilities:

Site Facilities (washroom, picnic area, etc)	56%
Maps/directions	14%
Shopping	7%
Adventure Recreation	7%
Attractions	6%
Food/Beverage	3%
Accommodation	3%
Parks	2%
Transportation	1%
Investment/Moving	1%

We continued to have more people asking about where to camp. Camping with facilities, at provincial parks and at forestry campgrounds were all popular questions. We gave out many copies of the Merritt Trail Guide that the City produced last year. In general, information about outdoor activities was a frequent request in this year of Covid-19.

### **Trends in Visitor Traffic**

The majority of visitors to our site were from B.C. with visitors from Alberta most days. 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>). Social distancing was the order of the day.



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

- The site was maintained by volunteers. We have had many excellent comments about our gardens and picnic area
- A new furnace will be installed in the Visitor Centre in October

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

The Visitor Centre at the Baillie House will be open from Tuesday to Saturday every week. The hours of operation will be 10 am to 4 pm. It will be staffed by one employee with one volunteer organizing the fundraising activities.

The new furnace will be installed in the Visitor Centre at the beginning of October.

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