

WINGS OVER WESTVIEW

By Margy Lutz

Pilots are notorious for seeking out new destinations. We're no different. Each summer, my husband and I would pack up our single engine Piper Arrow, leave our hectic jobs in Los Angeles and see what we could find.

Most summers we would head to Canada and camp by airplane. We found the Texada/Gillies Bay Airport to be an excellent place to stop after clearing customs in Boundary Bay, Nanaimo or Campbell River.

The airplane camping area is grassy with picnic tables. You can walk to the village of Gillies Bay, but if you call ahead, some of the restaurants and lodging facilities will pick you up. One excellent choice is the Texada Island Inn in Van Anda. The annual Fly-in and Airport Day in July is a perfect destination for pilots and airplane watchers alike.



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To get to the beach from the airport, take either the dirt road north of the runway or a trail just past the windsock. On the road, turn to the right at each junction and follow it downhill to the beach. Bring a picnic. It's likely you'll have the whole beach to yourself. To take the trail back, retrace your steps and then take the first dirt road to the right and exit at the windsock. On a recent walk we saw deer, robins, lots of Horsetail Fern and flowers in bloom.

In 2000, we decided to give Powell River Airport a try. The 3621-foot runway with an instrument approach was attractive for us with our "city-folk" retractable gear airplane. But it's proximity to wilderness made it even more enticing. My husband and I have flown to many beautiful locations and camped on small airports from Mexico to the Arctic Ocean, but none of those places can compare to the people, scenery and lifestyle in Powell River.

The Westview Flying Club welcomes pilots from far and wide. The clubhouse is a great place to grab a cup of coffee or sit a spell and tell flying stories (and pilots have plenty of those). The Airport Market is within walking distance for a quick snack or restocking provisions. But don't just make a touch-and-go. Head on down Duncan Street and stay awhile. You may never want to leave.



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We took our camping gear, rented a car in the terminal and headed for the Willingdon Beach campsite. We made this handy beachside campground our base for two weeks of fun.

We kayaked, boated on Powell Lake, swam, hiked, fished and relaxed in the sun. Of course, there are lots of B&BS, hotels and resorts if you aren't into camping.

We enjoyed ourselves so much we returned the following year and purchased a float cabin on Powell Lake. Now, Powell River is both our home and home-base.

If you don't have an airplane of your own, you can still fly to Powell River. Pacific Coastal Airlines has several scheduled flights from Vancouver's easy-to-use South Terminal. In less than half an hour you can be here starting the vacation of your dreams.

Texada Island Information	http://texada.org
Texada Island Inn	www.texadaislandinn.com
Willingdon Beach Campsite	www.willingdonbeach.ca
Pacific Coastal Airlines	www.pacificcoastal.com
<i>Up the Airway</i>	www.PowellRiverBooks.com

