Cordova Bay

The Ridge
The major topographical feature is the ridge that runs the length of the local area, rising from sea level at the bay on the east to approximately 90 metres then dropping again on the west to Elk Lake. The ridge affords dramatic views of Haro Strait, Mt. Baker, and the San Juan Islands to the east and Elk Lake and the Sooke Hills to the west.

View of Cordova Bay from Mt. Douglas
Photo: Darrell Wick

The Bay
The bay and it's attractive sandy beach have influenced the historical development and character of Cordova Bay.

What 's in a Name?

"Puerto de Cordova" was the name given to Esquimalt Harbour by the Spanish in 1790, during their explorations of the southern coastline of Vancouver Island. Around 1842, the Hudson Bay Company transferred the name Cordova Bay to its present location. The British navy, in their surveys of 1846, gave the bay the name "Cormorant"; however, the name was never accepted by the locals and in 1906 the Geographic Board of Canada restored the original name of Cordova Bay.

The Community

Cordova Bay is a community located in the northeast corner of Saanich, bounded by Central Saanich on the north, Haro Strait on the east, Patricia Bay Highway on the west, and Broadmead and Blenkinsop Valley on the south (see map on back).

Crown Colony Settlement by Hudson Bay Company

1900

Saanich employees picnic at Little Cordova Beach, ca. 1917. Saanich Archives, 1981-026-003a.

Clam bake on Cordova Bay beach ca. 1900.
Image G-04230 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

Cordova Bay was the site of an ancient traditional winter village and clam beach of the Coast Salish South-Saanich peoples.

In the 1850's, the lands of Vancouver Island were granted to the Hudson Bay Company for settlement as a Crown Colony. Two of the first people to settle in Cordova Bay in the early 1880's were Philip Touet and James Pusey. The first summer resident along the beach was Frederick Norris, a well-known Victoria businessman.

Driving along Cordova Bay Road, May 22, 1904.
Saanich Archives, 2010-050-165

In the late 1890's Cordova Bay became a popular summer retreat with city dwellers travelling by stagecoach and bicycle when a roadway was cleared from Cedar Hill Road around the side of Mt. Douglas, creating today's Cordova Bay Road.

A popular summer retreat

In 1912, the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway (which became the Canadian National Railway) ran tracks from Victoria to Bazan Bay along what is now Lochside Drive and the Lochside Regional Trail. A station was constructed at Haliburton Road. This brought a flood of summer residents and sparked the subdivision of the waterfront into small lots.

George McMorran opened a tearoom on the waterfront in 1919 and later added a dance pavilion. In 1928, he constructed a 14-unit auto court on the west side of Cordova Bay Road, and by the early 1930's he was renting 72 summer cabins.

By the 1920s, as many as 10,000 people would come to Cordova Bay to watch the diving contests and hydroplane races of the summer regattas.
Spectators at Cordova Bay Regatta, 1948. Saanich Archives, 2010-043-001.

1950

Transition to year-round residential area after WWII

The transition of Cordova Bay from summer retreat to year-round residential area began following the Second World War, as returning veterans sought family housing. The Seaview Shopping Plaza opened in 1960 to serve the growing community.
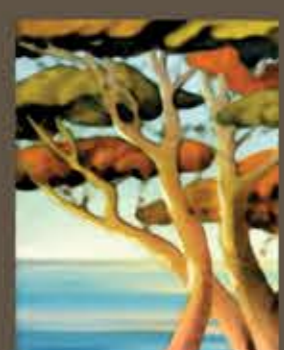
A proposal to build housing on Mattick's Farm prompted the formation of the Cordova Bay Association for Community Affairs in 1976. The Association was an active participant in the creation of the first Cordova Bay Local Area Plan, adopted in 1980, and continues to be an important voice for the area residents.

Today, Cordova Bay is a mixed rural and residential area of newer and older homes, and includes a small "village-like" strip of shops and restaurants along scenic Cordova Bay Road. The sand and pebble beach is great for exploring year-round, and is an especially popular spot for swimming and beach activities on warm summer days. There are also many parks and walking trails to enjoy in Cordova Bay (see map on back).

Aerial view of McMorran's Motor Court [196-].
Saanich Archives, 1989-008-214.

CORDOVA BAY ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

This sign was developed in collaboration with the Cordova Bay Association for Community Affairs (cbasn.com)

Saanich

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