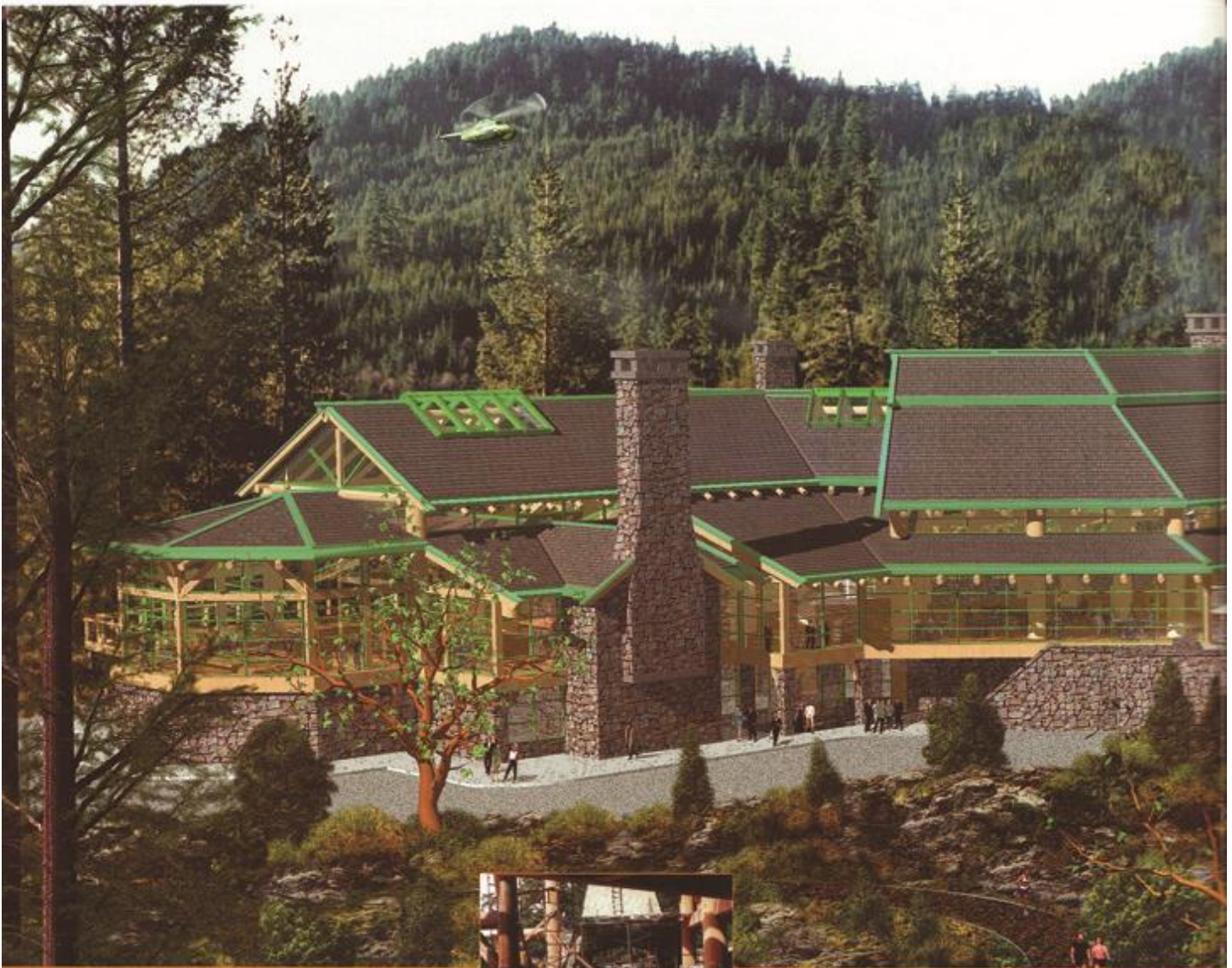


Deertrail Resort — a ruins or a lost dream?



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Deertrail Destination Resort is currently being developed as a unique, world-class retreat specializing in adventure, wellness, and ecotourism.

The spectacular 65-hectare (160-acre) **Deertrail** property is located near the community of Sooke, on southern Vancouver Island, 38 km (24 miles) west of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (see maps on back page). The site features 4.8 km (3 miles) of pristine river frontage along the Sooke River.



The **Deertrail** site runs roughly parallel to the **Gallopings Goose Trail** - a former railway line, and now a popular, easy-grade, hiking, cycling, and horseback riding trail which starts in Sooke, and winds its way through 60 km (37 miles) of the Greater Victoria area.

The centrepiece of the phased **Deertrail** development is the extraordinary 30,000 square foot (2,800 m²) **Timber Lodge**, perched on the edge of a river canyon wall, commanding a spectacular view of the river and roaring waterfalls 200 ft. (60 m) below. The Lodge features log and heavy timber construction, hand-cut sandstone arches, natural stone stairs, and includes a magnificent, four-sided, stone-faced, log-burning fireplace considered to be the largest in Canada. The architecture of the Lodge makes full use of local natural materials to compliment the intrinsic beauty and privacy of the landscape.

The Lodge and Hotel will offer food and beverage service capacity for up to 1,000 guests, 250 luxury hotel rooms and suites, conference facilities for 450 persons, pool, spa and fitness centre, various retail outlets, and a full support infrastructure.



Deertrail resort was a dream that never materialized.

Sooke historian Elida Peers tells the tale of ill-fated plan

One of the frequent questions asked by visitors to Sooke is, 'What is that stone structure up by the potholes of the Sooke River – is it a ruins?' Well, in a way it is "a ruins." The ruins of a dream held by Victoria residents Albert Yuen and his wife.

Early in the 1980s the 160-acre parcel of rocky, treed terrain alongside the Sooke River and the Falls was purchased by the Yuens from Jack Barnes, a Victoria accountant. Fresh from a business development in Victoria and an enterprise near Florence Lake in Langford, the visionary Yuens saw an opportunity for an innovative development.

While the details of their ideas altered from time to time, a world class resort in a natural setting, focused on preserving the environment as much as possible appeared to be the main thrust. With its massive timbers hewn from old growth Douglas fir, perched on the brink of a high cliff, small wonder that the structure taking shape riveted the eyes of viewers. The barbecue pit, enclosed in rock blasted from the terrain, was spacious enough to roast an ox.

The location was magnificent, one of the most spectacular river views on the island. With its beautiful setting, the Yuen vision that incorporated the use of natural stone, vegetation and local timber, this project attracted a lot of attention.

At the time a Victoria brewery was going out of business and selling its assets, and the Yuens purchased many of their large vats for water storage at Deertrail. The CNR line was being decommissioned, beginning a new life as the Galloping Goose Regional Trail, and the Yuens acquired and stockpiled stacks of railway ties for recycling.

The Yuens had obtained a government grant "seed money" for development in a period when there was an economic downturn and their intriguing plans attracted attention from architects and investors from around the world. Their promotional brochure identified the Deertrail Destination Resort as a world-class retreat specializing in adventure, wellness and ecotourism. Plans at one time included 250 luxury rooms and suites and conference facilities for 450.

The proposed development, in its varied forms, was not without controversy within the local community. Over the next two decades, the enterprise continued sporadically, with a series of planning changes including housing development and promotion as a media village, but it seemed that setbacks plagued the intriguing development throughout. It appeared that lack of investment dollars prevented the Yuens from being able to bring their dreams to fruition, and the partially completed structure fell into disrepair.

Today, the 160-acre site with its three miles of river frontage is held between The Land Conservancy and Capital Regional District Parks. While the structure never fully reached the point of looking like the promotional image depicted here, it was decided that as a safety measure, dismantling of the timbers would take place. This riverside property, bought in the 1920s by George and Sis Weiler, who raised turkeys and Jersey cattle on site, and called their mountain home Deertrail, has gone through an intriguing cycle. In the space here we can not begin to fully describe the story of Deertrail Resort, but perhaps we have answered the question "Is it a ruins?"

Elida Peers,

Historian

Sooke Region Museum