

# EMBRACE

## WHIDBEY & CAMANO ISLANDS

Escape to an island, hunt treasure, solve a murder, then hide out in a cozy room with a good book & a glass of something local to sip.

### The *Perfect* Winter Island Escape **By Kim Tate**

Many of us in the Puget Sound region delight in escaping to the islands for a city getaway. Visiting Whidbey Island in the winter months is the perfect time to relax and avoid the crowds. Life has slowed down, and visitors have the chance to soak up the small-town charm. So, pack your trusty raincoat and check out some of my favorite ways to escape the city bustle and slow down on Whidbey Island. Do keep in mind that some of the stores and activities might have weekend only hours during the winter months.

#### Solve a Mystery

One of my favorite events on Whidbey Island is the **Mystery Weekend** in Langley. This year on the weekend of February 22-23, 2025, visitors can participate in solving a who-dun-it mystery. You'll visit stores for clues, check out the scene of the crime, and even ask suspects questions, all for the chance to put in your guess of who the culprit of the crime is.

This is a great weekend getaway event for a momcation or romantic staycation. Book a nice hotel for a night or two in Langley and enjoy some small-town shopping and eating while living out your Sherlock Holmes dreams.

#### Find a Cozy Thing to Sip

Did you know that wine tasting is a popular thing to do on Whidbey Island? But even if you're not a wine drinker, the island also has a cidery and Meadery to delight all taste buds.

- Spoiled Dog Winery** is pet-friendly and also serves delicious Pinot Noir. They do have outdoor seating only but there are covered gazebos and heaters provided for the winter months. Enjoy a tasting and then get a bottle or even growler fill to take home with you to enjoy later.

- Comforts of Whidbey** was where I stayed during my recent visit to Langley. It's an adorable Bed & Breakfast with modern rooms located

above the tasting room. Comforts of Whidbey also has a delicious range of wines including some dry and sweet whites as well as robust Syrahs.

- Ott & Hunter** is a tasting room in the town of Langley, so it's the perfect spot to stop into while doing some street shopping. It also overlooks the Saratoga Passage so you can soak in some water views while wine tasting. Reservations are recommended.

- If ciders are more your style, you'll want to check out **Made by Misfits Cider Company** which is also in downtown Langley. It's a cute shop that just opened this summer and features a selection of dry ciders, mostly with a tropical theme.

- Looking for something non-alcoholic for Dry January? In addition to the not-so-standard mead tastings offered at **Hierophant Meadery** in Freeland, they also make non-alcoholic Switchel, golden milk powder, elderberry syrup and respiratory teas to help you stay healthy during the winter season.

- Craving a bite to eat along with your wine? Head to **Leo and Leto's Winery and Bistro** in Freeland for a cozy meal made with local ingredients and a variety of wines including fortified and sweet wines.

#### Embrace Nature

The mild winters on Whidbey Island make it the perfect place to get outdoors and enjoy the greenery of the PNW. Earth Sanctuary is located outside of Freeland and offers three self-guided tours that emphasize sculptures, sacred spaces, and nature.

#### Catch a Flick

Love classic movies? The Whidbey Island Film Festival takes place for two weeks from January 17-26 and showcases old films over the weekend. This year there's a special focus on black and white films.

Want to watch something modern in an old school way? Head to Blue Fox Drive In Theater to catch a family-friendly movie from the comfort of your car.

#### Watch a Show on Stage

Oak Harbor is home to the Whidbey Island Playhouse Community Theater, which is celebrating its 57th year. Catching one of their stage shows, with titles like A Christmas Carol, Annie, and The Sound of Music, is the perfect indoor activity for the winter months.

#### Buy Local

There are so many great local shops around Whidbey Island selling locally made gifts and food. One shop you'll want to check out is Wildly Beloved Foods in Clinton. This shop is a custom pasta shop where you can buy and order a variety of pastas in many different shapes and they're all made with Certified Organic Italian Semolina flour, local eggs from Daycreek Organic Farms, and organic baby spinach on beautiful Whidbey Island, Washington.

Even better, you can make a local treat to take with you during one of the Workshop pasta classes offered at Wildly Beloved. Make your own pasta as a souvenir and have a taste of the island back at home.

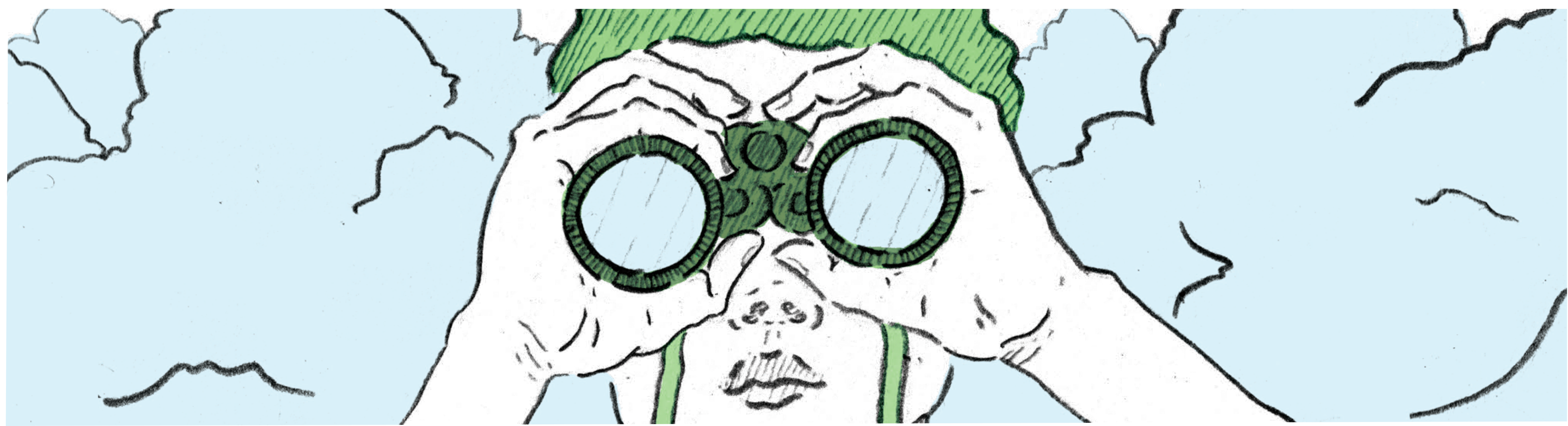
#### Curl Up with a Book

One of my favorite stores in Langley is Mooraker Books. This charming independent bookstore has been open for over 50 years. It's the perfect place to find a book by a local author or your next non-fiction read about the region. Grab a new title and head back to your hotel to curl up and relax.

Visiting Whidbey Island isn't just a summer weekend getaway idea. As you can see, the winter months offer visitors a chance to slow down and soak in some island charm on a winter weekend escape.

### The *Thrill of the Hunt* **By Suzanne Stavert**

On Camano Island, located just over 60 miles north of Seattle, in Possession Sound, you will find buried treasure. No, I'm not kidding; for the past 15 years, the creative people of Camano Island have celebrated the thrill of the hunt. Northwest Glass Quest is celebrating its 15th year and will be held February 16-23, 2025. The event is organized by the Camano Chamber of Commerce. For 10 days, businesses and parks throughout Stanwood & Camano Island hide plastic clue balls. You win a limited-edition Hand-Blown Glass Ball when you find a plastic clue ball. These glass ball prizes are one of a kind and so beautiful. It is a wonderful activity for all ages, and there is a fantastic website where all your questions and tips for a successful quest can be answered. Make sure to learn about the Kind Quester program for regenerative ways to take part and even get entered to win a handmade glass pebble heart. *For more on the story, go to [WhidbeyCamanoIslands.com](http://WhidbeyCamanoIslands.com)*



# Winter Outdoor Adventure:

## Winter on the Sound

By Adam Sawyer

It doesn't take a lot of convincing to get people over to Whidbey Island during the summer. With the water, woods, bucolic countryside, and culture, it's accessible island living at its finest. But a strong case can be made for driving or ferrying on over post-Labor Day. All of the aforementioned attributes aren't going anywhere, if anything they are augmented by the cozy season.

Ponder it for a moment. Do you like less crowds? My guess is yes. How about moody mornings and a smattering of fall colors? Affirmative. Are you a fan of finding solitude on a trail, spotting migratory birds at the beach, or wildlife on the water? Of course you are. Well now's your time to shine! With those things in mind, here are some personal favorite ways to enjoy sweater weather on Whidbey.

The Salish Sea offers some of her best during the quiet season. Watch for whales, eagles, and herons, and likely make solid eye contact with those ridiculously cute harbor seals. In fall, sharp eyes can spy migratory birds like grebes, scoters, loons, and a host of others.

If the elements are cooperative, views of Mt Baker and the North Cascades can be had in the distance. While crystal clear waters and madrone-lined bluffs tempt you to trace the shoreline.

### Grab Your Binoculars

A National Audubon-registered Important Bird Area (IBA), Deer Lagoon Preserve is home to no fewer than 211 different documented bird species. It consists of marsh, tidelands/mud flats, open water, and surrounding woodlands. Washington State Fish and Wildlife has concluded that Deer Lagoon is the single most important site on Whidbey Island for use by waterfowl, year-round. How important? It's been deemed a critical resting and feeding site for migrating shorebirds in the spring and fall. That is important.

The two access points to the lagoon are located within residential neighborhoods. So please be respectful when visiting - don't block driveways, carpool, if possible, etc.

### Lace-up Your Boots

Trails abound on Whidbey so it's easy to space out. But if you go in the fall, on a weekday, and to some of the non-headlining natural areas, there's a good chance that you can have a walk in the woods all to yourself.

The Saratoga Woods Preserve is well over 100 acres of protected, forested goodness near Langley. A series of trails explore every corner of the preserve which is home to large trees, lush and healthy understory, and a massive glacial

erratic among other highlights. In fall, this is a hotbed for mushroom foraging.

Further north in Coupeville, the Pacific Rim Institute doubles is home to a small network of paths that lead through open meadows and into dense forests. As such, it doubles as a place to get in a good leg stretch as well as watch and listen for an array of resident and migratory bird species.

And those activities barely scratch the surface of everything this island of off-season wonders has to offer. Just do a little digging once you get here. But don't forget to pack a sweater.

### Bio:

Adam Sawyer is an outdoor and travel writer, photographer, published author, guide, and public speaker based in Tillamook.



## Spotting the Island's Birds

Mindfulness, or intentional noticing, can be learned and has big payoffs, such as calming the central nervous system, enhancing creativity, improving memory, and deepening relationships with others and your surroundings. Birdwatching is a great way to learn how to notice more, while getting a good walk and fresh air. Here is a round-up of bird-related events going on this winter. **For exact dates, times, and to sign up, go to <https://www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org/events-calendar>.**

### Birding at Deception Pass: A Whidbey Audubon and Deception Pass State Park Partnership.

On select Saturdays each month, join AmeriCorps Interpretive Staff and expert volunteers from the Whidbey Audubon Society to discover some of the common, and not so common, species of birds that call the park home. Walks are designed for birders of all levels. Practice bird identification skills, explore unique bird habitats and learn from other birders. There is no cost to attend, but it is recommended to bring your own binoculars and/or scopes, though there will be a few on hand to borrow. A Discover Pass or day permit is required for each vehicle.

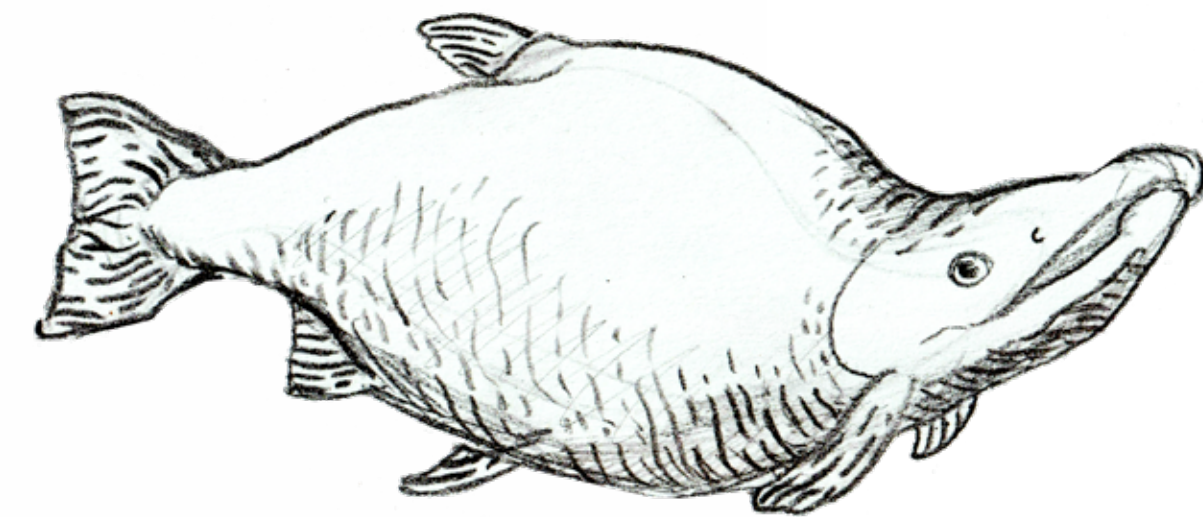
Whidbey Audubon monthly programs are open to the public and both January and February will be virtual. **Sign up on the Whidbey Audubon Event page to get the Zoom link.**

- Thursday, January 9: Books, Birds and Following Passion's Path with Julie Zickefoose
- Thursday, February 13: Under the Surface: Bird Bones and Skeletons with David Lukas
- Thursday, March 13: Grebes Are Great with Connie Sidles (This will be a hybrid meeting. Attend in person at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation meeting house, Freeland.

**The Winter Special Skagit and Samish Deltas Field Trip** will be on Sunday, February 16, led by

Jay Adams and Ruth Richards. The area is considered one of the top winter raptor viewing sites in the U.S. and also has large concentrations of waterfowl. More details and sign-up on the Whidbey Audubon Event page.

**2025 Snow Goose & Birding Festival** - Saturday, February 22, 2025 Experience one of Western Washington's most spectacular natural events - the annual winter gathering of thousands of Snow Geese and Trumpeter Swans. The festival will include: birding lectures, live bird displays, speakers, art, children's activities, vendors, plus shuttles, maps, tours and guides. There is a small entrance fee, but children under 12 are free. For more information, go to <https://www.sahs-fncc.org>.



## Sound Waters University 2025

The stunning beauty, unique geology, and natural diversity of the Salish Sea take center stage at Sound Waters University 2025. Experts in geology, marine life, indigenous knowledge, sea level rise, and salmon estuaries will share insights about this extraordinary ecosystem that includes Whidbey and Camano Islands. The goal is to foster a sense of place, educate residents and visitors, and inspire action to protect the Salish Sea. Now in its 31st year, this annual one-day event in early February is open to all.

Sound Waters University 2025 will be held on February 1, 2025, at Coupeville High School, 501 S Main St., Coupeville, WA. Tickets cost \$70.00, with optional pre-ordered box lunches. Local restaurants and lodging are also available. Discounts are often offered for teachers, students, and military members. Registration is required at: <https://soundwatersuniversity.org/>

The day begins with the keynote, "Our Place in the Salish Sea: Issues & Challenges," co-presented by Kathryn Sobocinski and Aquila Flower from WWU's Salish Sea Institute. Later, Marco Hatch, a Samish Indian Nation member and WWU professor, will present "The Science of Indigenous Knowledge." The event concludes with "Immerse Yourself in the Salish Sea" by Annie Crawley, an underwater photographer and ocean advocate. Participants can also choose from classroom sessions on topics like seabird migration, estuary protection, saving salmon, storm surge, and citizen science.

For those unable to attend, Sound Water Stewards offers educational media on Whidbey and Camano's marine environments: <https://soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/media-gallery/>. Beachgoers can use the *Marine Ez-Id* guide: <https://soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/marine-species-identification/>. For deeper learning, Sound Water Stewards also provides a year-long volunteer training program: <https://soundwaterstewards.org/get-involved/join-sws/>.



Whidbey and Camano  
**ISLANDS**  
Washington State - USA



Want to hear more about what's happening on Whidbey and Camano Islands? Visit [WhidbeyCamanoIslands.com](https://WhidbeyCamanoIslands.com) and sign up for our monthly newsletters!



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# Local Authors with Who-dun-its to Tell

The greatest mystery novels all have one thing in common: the solution cannot be too obvious. When the grand dénouement is at last unraveled, the reader must be struck with wonder, shock, deep fascination, and close the book thinking, “how did I miss that,” salivating with an unquenchable thirst to join the detective on their next adventure.

The world is littered with inspiring destinations to author and devour immersive mystery tales. But perhaps one of the most incredible locales to crack the next case is a little less... obvious.

Camano and Whidbey Islands are entangled with a thriving mystery novelist scene, home to countless published authors, and attracting thousands of guests and part-time residents each year to escape to the islands' solitude and world apart. Camano Island authors Mimzi Schradi, author of *Frantic in Fiji* and *Poisoned in Paris*, and Naomi Wark, author of *Wildflowers in Winter* and *Songs of Spring*, find Island County a writer's paradise. “[This] is such a cool place to write, I can go to my backyard or window, and feel like I'm in a special place, where creativity abounds,” says Schradi. “Your senses are stimulated on a daily basis - sound, taste, smell - we have the most wonderful coffee shops and French pastries. I don't have to go on a [writer's] retreat - my environment is my retreat.”

“I love The Loft at Camano Commons,” echoes Wark, a popular coffee shop for gathering and local artists to paint. “Besides living two blocks from the beach, an ever-present source of inspiration, is the incredible supportive community for writers.” Whether at Camano's Terry's Corner, one of the many branches of the Sno-Isle Library system, the Skagit Valley Writers, Camano Island Library Friends, or directly with one another, the Islands' novelists frequently engage one another to brainstorm, share new pieces, critique each other's work, and grow together as masters of storytelling. “Uniquely to Island County is that the traditional art community has truly embraced and blended with local authors,” says Schradi. “They consider us as equal artists, participating in exhibitions, and sharing a mutual respect. It's been a love fest with the Stanwood Camano Arts Advocacy Commission (SCAAC), where art is all-encompassing, it's not just for someone holding a paintbrush.”

For those who are already inspired by the atmosphere and mysterious “vibe” of the Pacific Northwest, Seattle, Edmonds, or Port Townsend, Camano and Whidbey Island have myriad locales to escape to, wrap up with a warm blanket and cup of hot cappuccino, and get lost in the next great book. From the covered picnic tables at English Boom County Park to the cozy couches next to the river-rock fireplace in Cama Beach's Cafe, Matzke Sculpture Park to innumerable isolated beaches, there's no shortage of inspiring spots to follow the next great caper.

Books are a way for us to travel the world of wondrous sites and fascinating characters, and the greatest escape to write or read the next one is just a ferry's ride away - where you may find Whidbey and Camano Island's author's quietly studying the passengers, integrating them into the next great mystery adventure.

## A Book to Curl Up With Island Booksellers

### The Book Rack

A wonderful outlet to role dice and read something nice.

551 NE Midway Building #4 Oak Harbor, 98277  
www.bookrack.com  
bookrack@whidbey.net  
(360) 675-6705  
Owner Matt Daniel

### Kingfisher Books

A seaside inspirational haven for literary learners, creators, travelers, and dreamers.

16 NW Front St. Coupeville, 98239  
www.kingfisherbookstore.com  
Hello@kingfisherbookstore.com  
(630) 678-8463  
Owners Meg and Brad Olson

### Moonraker Books

Named for a swift topsail, this bookstore has served generations of Langley residents and guests. 209 1st St.

Langley, 98260  
www.bookshop.org/shop/moonraker  
Moonrkr@whidbey.com  
(360) 221-6962  
Owner Josh Houser

### Mutiny Bay Books

Browse over 1,500 titles immersed in the smell of old tomes and the tones of soft classical music.

1638 E Main St. Freeland, 98249  
mutinybaybooks@gmail.com  
(206) 474-6246  
Owner Bob Markey

### Camano Commons Marketplace

This community anchor is well known for its pastries, coffee, ice cream, local gifts, and excellent atmosphere.

848 N Sunrise Blvd Suite C Camano Island, 98282  
www.camanocommons.com  
(360) 722-7459  
Owner Brandon Ericson



## February... the Game is Afoot in Langley

February 23-24, 2025, marks the 40th anniversary of Langley's Mystery Weekend, the country's longest-running annual Interactive Mystery Event. The playful and creative residents of Whidbey and Camano Islands are joined by aspiring sleuths from across the world to crack a homemade, fictional murder case. Fueled by social media, the popularity of true crime intrigue, and coast-to-coast coverage from *The Oregonian* to the *New York Times*, Sydney, Australia to even the *Hallmark Channel*, attendance has grown to nearly 3,000 participants last year. But it doesn't take a team of crack detectives to understand why it continues to grow in popularity - it comes down to the creative team and welcoming community behind it all.

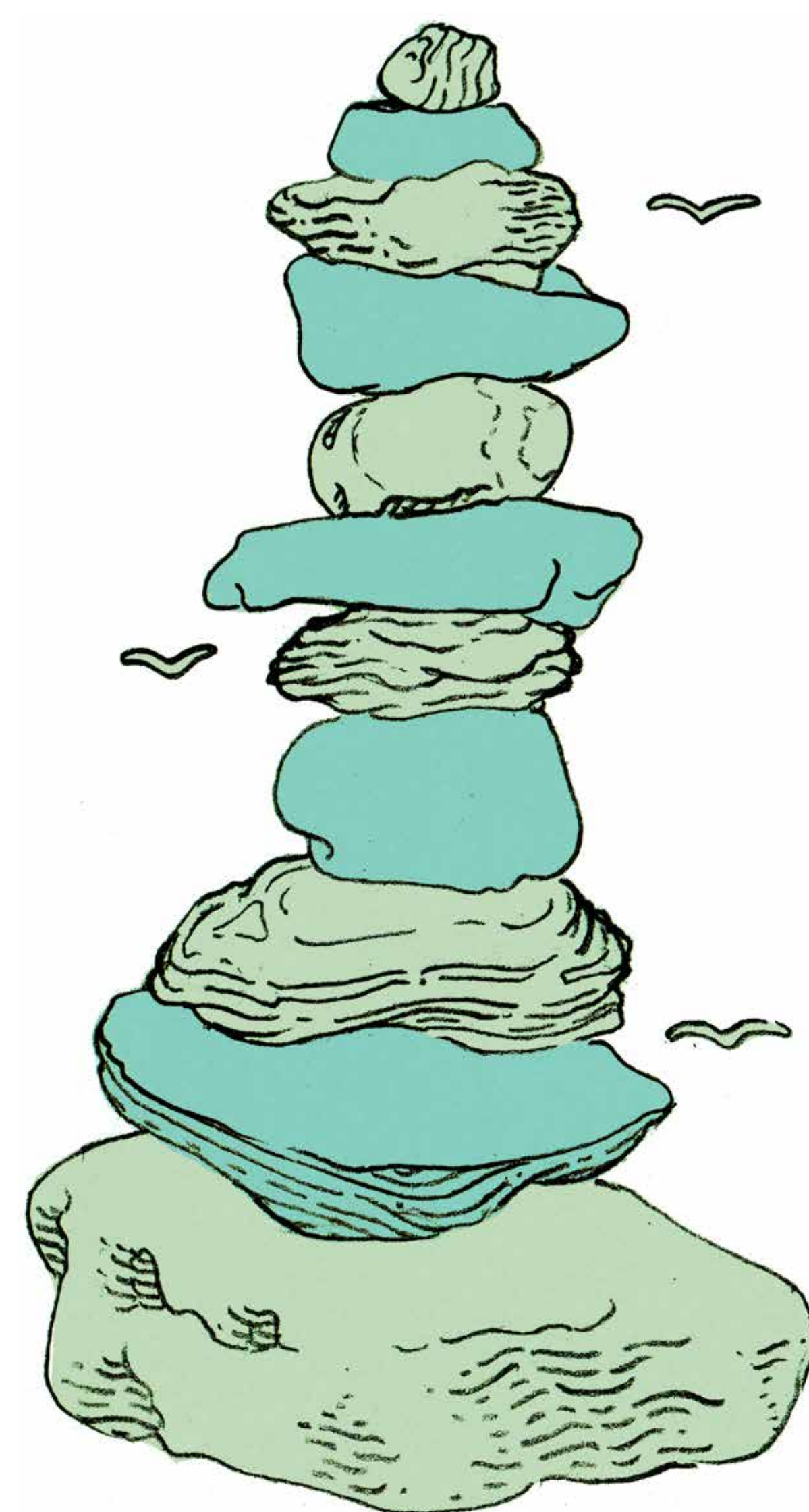
This will be Loretta Martin's 26th year coordinating and authoring Mystery Weekend. The affable and unabashedly creative Island County resident may be better recognized by her character name Polly Anna Graph, a hallmark of the topically contemporary and pun-laden mysteries she and her cast members cook up each year. “Mystery Weekend is one of the most fun things I've ever done, and I've done a lot of fun and interesting things in my career,” Martin chuckles. “I think I'm one of the luckiest writers in the whole world, because every single year I get to see every character I write come to life. The actors deeply commit to their roles, further imagine their own backstories and motivations, create stunning costumes, and I'm overjoyed to see the world we collaboratively devise.”

To celebrate the event's 40th anniversary, Martin has written the next chapter in a town-favorite mystery from the turn of the century, when the 49ers Club - a group of poker enthusiasts - were willed a beautiful estate outside of town after the “murder” of character Coco Geeherdelli. In 2025, a family heir has surfaced to retake the stunning property back from the 49ers Club; and the unavoidable and controversial lawsuit has brought the town to its breaking point, resulting in the mysterious and shocking murder of the president of the 49ers Club, C. Z. Cash, and the community is now calling on you to come help solve the murder and return peace to the quaint, coastal town of Langley.

To join this family-friendly weekend, sleuths can buy their tickets online in advance. Participants receive a fictional newspaper - *The Langley Gazette* - which gives context to the town at the time of the crime and the profiles of the suspects. Sleuths are then encouraged to explore Langley over two days, locating and interviewing the costumed suspects, and piecing together the clues to the murder. Precisely at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, participants gather at the Whidbey Children's Theater, where Texas Ranger: Ranger Chase Catchum delivers the denouement, the motivations and alibis of each subject, and reveals the culprit. Local law enforcement from Island County and Langley cart the criminal away in handcuffs to cheers, gasps, and “it couldn't have been you!” shouts from the standing room-only auditorium, followed by a wide array of locally donated prizes for correct solutions and participation.

“There's such a beautiful camaraderie that forms during Mystery Weekend between our guests and residents,” says Martin, “and I hope it goes on for another 40 years.” Reflecting on some of her favorite past participants, “whether you're a team-building group from Boeing stringing red yarn between clues and photographs, a pub Murder Mystery Team from the Cotswolds, or the Detective Dachshund Bloodhound Club, I hope to see you again this year, and I hope so many more locals and guests venture out to experience this inimitable event.”

Tickets for Mystery Weekend can be purchased at [VisitLangley.com/Mystery-weekend](http://VisitLangley.com/Mystery-weekend) or at the Langley Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center on both days of the event at 208 Anthes Ave. Langley WA starting at 10 a.m.





# Great Beaches for Winter Walks

In summer, the beach is all joy, bright color, laughter, splashing, and digging. In the winter, it's quiet, bundled walks of reflection and discovery. The summer is social, but in winter you give one another wide berths, allowing for personal space and nods of shared humility. The sky and sea come together in many shades of gray, from deep charcoal to shimmering silver. Winter shows us just how small we really are in the face of Mother Nature. But nothing helps to beat the winter blues better than going for a walk.

**Safety Tip:** Our highest daytime tides are during the winter and many of these beaches have high bluffs, so be sure to check tide heights and allow time to make your way back before the early sunset.

**1. Dugalla State Park Property.** Address: 799 E Sleeper Rd, Oak Harbor. This state park property (although not an officially-listed state park) offers a complex of hiking trails including a 3-mile (round trip) hike to the beach. This quiet beach offers a respite from the wind with its northeast facing shoreline with pretty views of the Skagit River delta. WA State Discover Pass required for parking.

**2. West Beach Vista.** 2407 West Beach Rd, Oak Harbor. Park on the West side of the road, uphill at a fenced outlook and tideland extends for 2 miles to the south. This Island County park site is known for its Olympic Mountain sunsets, dramatic winter waves, and sometimes, kitesurfers!

**3. Ebey's Landing.** Intersection of Ebey's Landing Rd and Hill Rd, Coupeville. This iconic beach is on every Whidbey 'must-do' list, so take advantage of enjoying it during the 'quiet' season, when it is especially magical. WA State Discover Pass required for parking.

**4. Hidden Beach.** 2269 Hidden Beach Dr., Greenbank. As its name hints, this small, quiet spot is a beautifully pebbled beach which extends north from the ample parking area. Enjoy expansive views of Saratoga Passage, Baby Island, Camano Island, and Holmes Harbor.

**5. Double Bluff Beach.** Western terminus of Double Bluff Rd, Freeland. Another of Whidbey's iconic beaches, and a true winter's delight. Choose your pleasure—a long walk for the full 2 miles to the west and back or stay close to the entrance to watch the kiteboarders on a windy day. And bring the dog; it's an off-leash park.

**6. Possession Point State Park.** Terminus of S. Franklin Road. From the parking lot, follow a trail down to the beach. Make your way to the south and west for a mile, taking in the expanse of Puget Sound Great for tide-pooling and birdlife. Can be paired with hiking the Dorothy Cleveland Trail for a longer walk. WA State Discover Pass required for parking.

**7. English Boom Trail.** Terminus of Moore Rd, Camano. This gem provides an easy and ADA-accessible boardwalk and other trails through salt marshes and mudflats that provide rich wildlife habitat, plus amazing views of Mt Baker on a clear day.

**8. Iverson Spit Preserve.** Terminus of Iverson Rd, Camano. This fairly flat spot has 3 trails through a mixture of wetlands, thickets, beach, and boardwalk which can be woven together for a satisfying outing. The tideland extends to the north, to the end of the spit.

**9. Barnum Point County Park.** 278 S Sunrise Blvd, Camano. One of Camano's jewels, this park has it all—forests, bluffs, Cascade views, and 2 points of access to the beach.



Anacortes

Fidalgo Island

Deception Pass

1.

2.

Oak Harbor

Camano Island

7.

Coupeville

8.

Whidbey Island

3.

9.

4.

Greenbank

Port Townsend

Langley

Freeland

5.

Clinton

Mukilteo

6.