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Educational Adventure British Columbia

BY MEGAN HILL

Rob Bryce is pointing to a set of grizzly tracks on a beach off the Skeena River, northern British Columbia's historical powerhouse. Though I feel a flutter of nervousness, he's nonchalant about these massive paw prints, given that he explores this remote area with regularity.

After stepping over the tracks and scrambling up a muddy ravine, our group of five stumbles into a dark, mossy forest filled with cracked, moss-draped headstones. Their barely legible epitaphs date to the late 1800s and early 1900s—fading homages to hardscrabble lives eked out along the Skeena, when it was once a commercial hub thanks to a slew of salmon canneries.

Bryce and his colleagues offer Educational Adventure tours along the Skeena River through the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The artery is speckled with ghost towns, canneries, abandoned cemeteries and First Nations sites, most of which are relatively inaccessible and rarely visited, even by the heartiest of locals.

These unique excursions bring history to life, taking visitors by jet boat to an array of fascinating relics. Bryce, an avid historian, is as much an expert in local lore as he is with the jet boat wheel. He navigates the tricky Skeena and its canyons and tributaries with

precision, weaving tales of murders, boat wrecks and more.

This year, UNBC's Educational Adventure courses, The Port Essington Experience and Canneries of the North Coast, both explore former cannery towns; Ghost Towns of Northwest BC, a photographer's dream that includes exclusive access to little-visited sites; and Skeena River Historic Journey by Jet Boat, which retraces the routes of early 1900s sternwheelers along the Skeena.

Combining education and exploration, these small-group trips visit sites otherwise unavailable to tourists—no other tour companies offer similar excursions. They're ideal for photographers, history buffs and travelers looking for a unique experience in a beautiful and remote setting.

After we explore the cemetery, we slosh across the grizzly-tracked mud flats and clamber back into the jet boat. Bryce jumps aboard with the anchor, and we're off, banking our turns past fog-ringed mountains, zooming toward another adventure.

To learn how you can experience northern B.C. on a UNBC tour, visit unbc.ca/continuing-studies/courses/tours. The northern B.C. point of departure depends on which tour you book, each is accessible by flight from Vancouver. 📍