

are reminders of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations peoples. Sculptures, totems, the First Nations Galleries and Our Living Languages exhibit at the Royal British Columbia Museum are an essential to understand Victoria and Vancouver Island.

It is rare to experience a city where the tensions between history, memory and representation are active parts of public visual discourse. Canada really *is* better, I thought.

Eager to experience the natural beauty of Victoria, we took the recommendation of a few locals and headed 15 miles north to Goldstream Provincial Park. The park is known for Railway Trestle hike — a short but steep two-mile hike to the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railroad bridge over Niagara Creek.

No longer in use, the bridge spans a canyon 450 feet below the tracks. At each end, the train tracks disappear into thick woods. In what felt like a scene from *Goonies* or *Moonrise Kingdom*, brave souls walk hesitantly on the tracks. In a mix of fear, adrenaline and reckless abandon, I ventured out on the tracks, marveling at the faith we place in wood, metal and screws.

Leaving Victoria, we headed north on the Trans-Canada Highway 150 miles to Campbell River with our sights on our destination, Quadra Island. Known as one of the Discovery Islands, Quadra is among several small islands found along the inside passage between Vancouver Island and mainland Canada.

Accessible by a 15-minute ferry ride from Campbell River, Quadra Island is nothing short of paradise. From our guesthouse at Loon Point, we spent hours watching juvenile bald eagles and harbor seals.

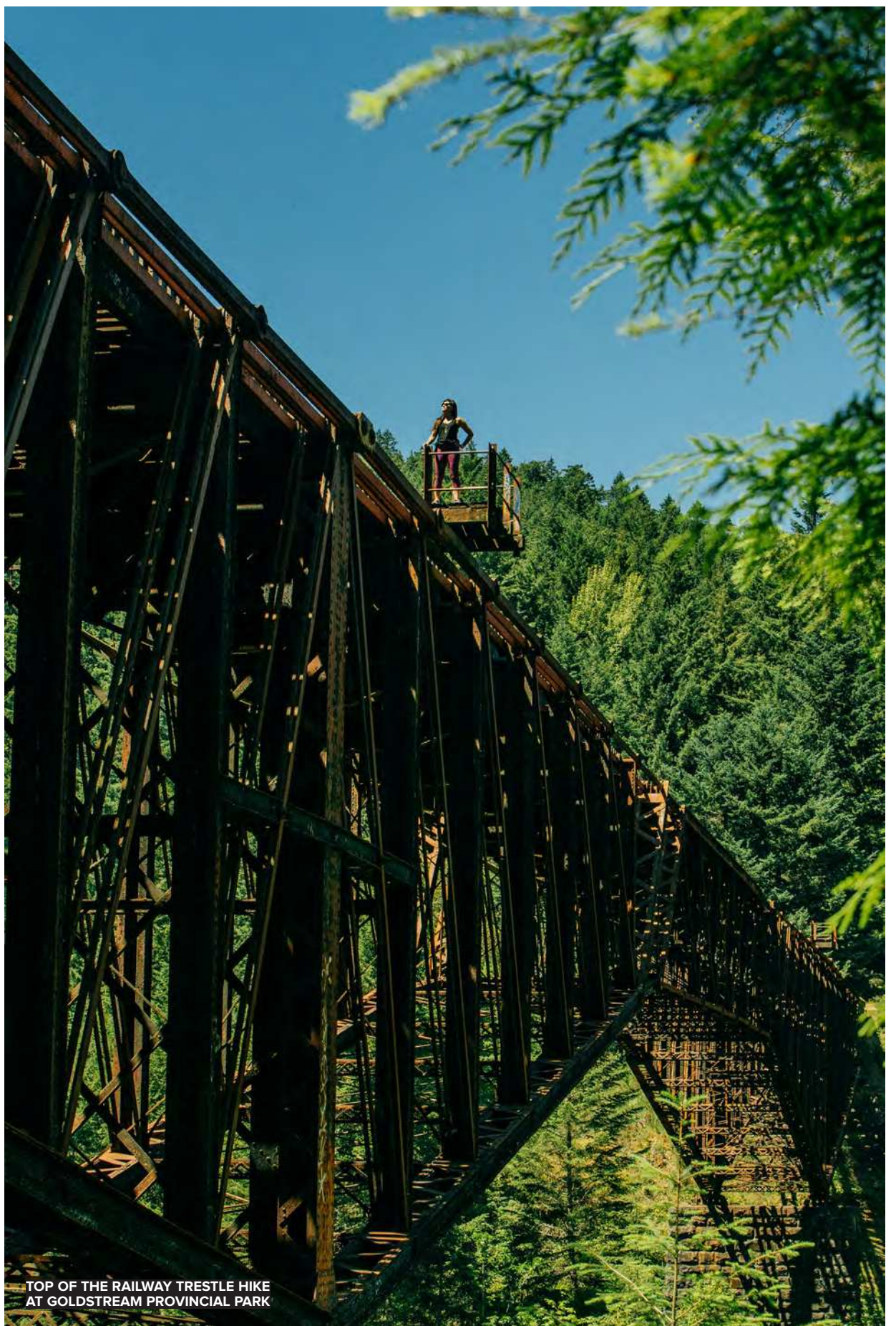
Following a recommendation from our host, we booked a half-day whale watching tour with Eagle Eye Adventures. Within the first half-hour our guide brought us to a pod of orcas. With our guide's extensive knowledge of the local pod and the visiting transient orcas, we learned about the family dynamics of the specific pod we encountered. While we were fixated on the orcas, our guide called out, "humpback whale on the right!" In a specular moment, we turned to see a massive humpback whale gracefully come up for air.

Having already exceeded my expectations, our tour continued along the archipelago of the Discovery Islands. In the calm waters, a pod of dolphins played in our boat's wake. Next, we arrived at a series of rapids where a massive group of bald eagles gathered to feast on fish that rise to the surface.

In nothing less than a scene from *National Geographic*, we gasped as hundreds of eagles took turns swooping lazily down to fish. After several awe-inspiring encounters, our guide ushered us back to Quadra Island with an invitation to return in the fall for a grizzly expedition led by guides from the Homalco First Nations.

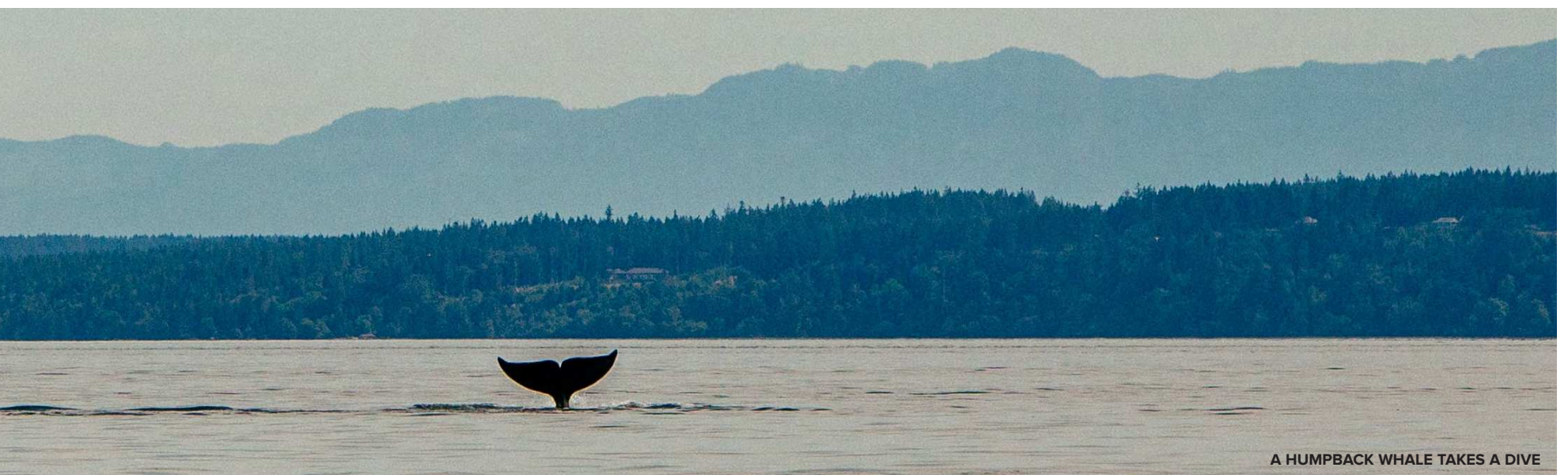
Our fancier and slightly envied next-door neighbor Vancouver Island left us with plenty of reasons to return — one of which being our road trip was a perfect balance of adventure and ease. Our journey did stoke my fantasies of defecting and getting a kayak.

*Nadia Raza is an instructor of sociology at Lane Community College. She is urban homesteading enthusiast and has been adopted by several unruly animals.*



TOP OF THE RAILWAY TRESTLE HIKE  
AT GOLDSTREAM PROVINCIAL PARK

PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER



A HUMPBACK WHALE TAKES A DIVE