



All creatures great and grizzly

British Columbia will introduce a ban on trophy hunting of grizzlies this month. Sarah Marshall meets an ex-hunting guide in the Cariboo Mountains who pioneered bear tourism in the province

Wading through waist-height devil's club shrubs with leaves the size of dinner plates, I feel like a shrinking Alice in Wonderland.

Everything around me is enormous.

Towering until they almost block out the sky, colossal cedars and hemlocks create a comforting sanctuary, securely grounded by their ancient roots. For a relatively young country celebrating 150 years since Confederation this year,

these 400-year-old beauties are historical monuments.

In Canada, everything is supersized: distances are vast, forests are endless, and wildlife is wonderfully abundant. It's a scale almost incomprehensible to someone from a small European island which could probably fit neatly into the pocket of west coast province **British Columbia**.

And if the sights are big, the sounds are even bigger: The grumbling of a sore-head sleeping

ing grizzly disturbed from his slumber echoes around the forest canopy like a rumbling storm about to break.

Frozen to the spot, his eyes darting wildly, Gary Zorn shhs a wrinkled index finger to his appropriately ghost-white beard. A seasoned guide, with 40 years' experience trekking bears in this area, he's not afraid, he's simply listening and

anticipating what the grumpy grizzly metres away from us might do next.

Originally a tracker

for hunters, 71-year-old Gary is a master of bear behaviour, but early on he made the decision to swap guiding guns for leading wildlife tours, and is one of **British Columbia's** true pioneers.

On November 30, the trophy hunting of grizzly bears will be banned in the province, a decision welcomed by many and



supported by the economic growth of nature tourism, proof these animals are worth far more alive than dead.

“Hunting was becoming a dirty word,” explains Gary on his initial decision to change tack. “But when I told friends ecotourism was the way forward, they laughed at me.” Firmly resolute, he carried on and was granted the wildlife guiding permit 001, the first to be issued in the province.

Based at Pyna-tee-ah lodge at the base of the Cariboo Mountains, deep inside BC, he runs Ecotours BC with his wife Peggy, operating almost exclusively in an area the size of Switzerland. Combining boat trips along salmon-filled rivers, active treks through sub-Alpine forest and even (on occasion) heli-hikes to peaks above the clouds, he promises wild, intimate but always respectful encounters, deservedly earning him the moniker

‘Bear Whisperer’ - a title he’s trademarked.

Next summer, Gary plans to launch an ambitious glamping site in this remote, peak-fringed wilderness, with smart safari-style tents pitched on a floating platform. Dawn and dusk brown bear viewing will be possible, with days spent exploring caves by kayak and hiking through ancient forest.

Thousands of sockeye salmon return here from September to October, firing upstream like silver bullets until they mutate into plump, green-gilled, devil-red monsters, travelling from the Pacific Ocean before spawning and dying in the place they were born. They’re a bedrock in the food chain and provide a particularly tasty meal for bears. ■ Ecotours BC (ecotours-bc.com) offer several packages, visit explore-canada.co.uk and hellobc.co.uk.