

Jack London Museum interpreters from Canada make pilgrimage to Glen Ellen

Last week, four interpreters from the Jack London Museum in Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada traveled 3,200 miles to visit Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen.





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Interpreters from the Jack London Museum of Dawson City in Canada from left are Joann Vriend, Helen Winton, Angela Van Nostrand and Scotto Masters. (Tim Curley)

TIM CURLEY

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In the year of our Lord 2023, some 446,000 people put on their pilgrim hats and walked the 500 miles of the Camino de Santiago, one of the world's busiest pilgrimages. Once they reached their destination, a visit to the shrine of the Apostle St. James was made.

Taking about 30 days to complete, the trek to spiritual renewal is a supreme test of endurance and sometimes a life-changing experience.

Last week, four "pilgrims" traveled from Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada to Glen Ellen, to visit [Jack London State Historic Park](#). This trip, made during the dead

of winter, ticked off about 3,200 miles. Taking only five days total, the trip for these four Canadians turned out to be incredibly memorable.

The four fearless travelers, Joann Vriend, Helen Winton, Scotto Masters, and the de facto spokesperson for the group, Angela Van Nostrand are all museum interpreters at the [Jack London Museum in Dawson City](#). It took them four plane legs, one shuttle bus, and a rental car to reach their room at the Sonoma Valley Lodge.

Museum interpreters take on a deeper role than docents in engaging visitors to museums and undergo more specialized training. As interpreters at the museum in Dawson, they all have cultivated a keen interest in all things Jack London. Their museum is devoted 100% to London, his life, and his writings.

Of course, those writings include “White Fang” and “Call of the Wild,” all set in the Yukon. The pièce de résistance of the museum is the replica of the cabin that London lived in while he wrote during the winter of 1897, just after the Klondike Gold Rush.

Visitors to the small museum are encouraged to peek into the cabin. Originally located 80 miles away from Dawson on the North Fork of Henderson Creek, Yukon, the cabin was painstakingly reverse engineered and carefully relocated. Van Nostrand said, “they made two replicas out of the one original.” One half is in Dawson, the other half now stands near Heinhold’s First and Last Chance Saloon in Oakland, where London also spent much time.

“The last time we saw the cabin in Dawson, it was -30 degrees Celsius. and the cabin was covered in snow. Then we saw the other half in Oakland surrounded by palm trees,” Van Nostrand remarked, astonished.

Open May through September, the museum is a popular destination for thousands of tourists. Dawson is a bustling town in the summer and is part of an official UNESCO site known as [Tr’ondëk-Klondike](#).

Working at the museum has given the four women a major case of the London flu, and after an offer was extended by Glen Ellen resident and uber-serious London enthusiast Darius Anderson, plans were made to visit London’s home in Glen Ellen. Anderson made a few calls and set them up with the VIP treatment while visiting our area.

“I’ve been dreaming about this for years,” Van Nostrand said.

Bags were packed and the journey began. Van Nostrand was selected to be the driver for the foursome.

“Driving itself was an adventure,” she said. “For the last 30 years I have been living in Dawson City, Yukon, Canada, a small town of 2,000 year-round residents, no paved roads, no traffic lights and definitely no highways with more than two lanes.”

The four women were quite stunned by the beauty of the Valley of the Moon. “I’ve never seen a Redwood tree before,” Van Nostrand said. “And I was taken with the rows of Eucalyptus trees, wondering if they were the very trees that Jack planted so many years ago.”

I was invited to tag along as the visitors were given a fabulous tour of Jack London State Historic Park on Friday, Jan. 17 by the very knowledgeable and friendly docent Cathy Hillbeck. The glorious weather we had that day impressed me almost as much as it impressed the visitors from the Northland, where this time of year there is no direct sunshine for several weeks. We, however, basked in splendid Sonoma sunshine.

Hopping on a tricked-out golf cart, we toured the park, starting inside the House of Happy Walls, dipping down the hill to gaze upon the ruins of the Wolf House, then the Londons’ gravesite, back up to the Pig Palace and lake, finally wrapping it all up at the cottage where both Jack and his wife, Charmian, passed away after living rich and full lives

The travelers asked many questions and had many comments about London and the park. Sometimes focusing on detailed minutia and occasionally gasping at the vistas, the women were duly impressed with the surroundings and gobsmacked by the beauty of the park and its history.

They returned to their chilly, wintery homes renewed in their enthusiasm for London and anxious to share their experiences with visitors back home. They will also forever be champions of the Valley of the Moon.

Jack London State Historic Park is a jewel, one that both Sonoma Valley residents and Canadians can thoroughly enjoy. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Christmas Day, it is an easy and rejuvenating day trip for locals. One that I, and four women from Dawson, Yukon Territory, Canada highly recommend.