



# Innovation Snapshot

British Columbia has thousands of innovative entrepreneurs and leaders in tourism. These people are one of the best sources of information on what works and does not work in the industry.

Innovator in:  
Visitor Experience

Key Words: *Forestry, product development, small operator, pub and restaurant, experience*

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## The Burner: New Experiences from Old Industries

Randy Love

### Background

Malakwa is a community of 800 people located along the Trans Canada Highway, east of Salmon Arm in the Shuswap area of BC. The stretch of highway between Salmon Arm and Golden is home to a cluster of unique tourism attractions, like 3 Valley Gap, the Enchanted Forest, Miniature Land, Crazy Creek and others that pull people off of the highway during the busy tourist seasons. The unincorporated community of Malakwa is like many towns in BC that started because of a growth in industry and the construction of the railroad. The community then made the transition from a railway economy to a forestry economy. At its peak, the community 75% of employment was based on sawmills and 25% based on agriculture.

Ray who built and owns the Burner has lived in Malakwa since 1968 and worked at the sawmill. With an entrepreneurial spirit, Ray has been self employed in Malakwa's forestry industry since 1974. With the downturn in forestry, Ray had other visions for the community and foresaw tourism as an industry with potential for this area.

### The Issue

Creating a successful tourism business is not an easy task. The visitor experience is quite unlike resource industries that sell manufactured products. The success of a tourism business is largely dependent on the experience that the guests have. What sets tourism businesses apart is the intangible experiences that visitors have, take away with



them, and share with others. These intangible experiences come from not only the service and friendliness of the staff, but also how the décor of the space makes the guest feel when they are there. Creating a unique experience and a quality product can create a strong competitive advantage for a tourism business and encourage positive word of mouth advertising. In tourism, having a unique experience helps set entrepreneurs apart from others and contributes to overall success.

### **The Innovation**

In the mid 1980's, Ray first had the idea that a beehive burner would be an interesting place for a pub and over the years he continued to put the plan together. When the local beehive was decommissioned, Ray went through the process of acquiring the structure. Renovations were needed to strengthen the structure back to the proper building code regulations. After renovations were done, the structure was dismantled and moved across the highway to its new location. The beehive burner was rebuilt and Ray began construction on the inside of the pub.

Construction took five years, and with the help of some locals who worked at the saw mill they created a 150 seat pub with a stage that has hosts many traveling bands. The inside is very impressive, as you discover that the two story pub is built inside of the burner. The majority of the structure is made of local wood, and it has large windows to bring light in and allow the visitor to see the burner tower above. The inside is decorated with logging equipment and adds to providing a very unique experience that blends the outgoing forestry industry with the incoming tourism industry. Ray has also designed T-shirts that guests can buy to take home to remember their experience and promote the pub through word of mouth.

### **The Outcome**

The Burner has been a success, and is even used as a reference point for providing directions in the local area. As an example, people mention that Sicamous is a 15 minute drive past the Burner. Since opening in 2004, Ray has heard stories of friends seeing his t-shirts being worn in Australia, and people talking about his business in Saskatchewan. It has received TV publicity through Mike Roberts "on the road" show which airs on CHBC and the local lakeshore news has also done a story on the pub. As well, service staff in the nearby city of Salmon Arm sees the Burner as the place to work at.

Ray is also happy that he has filled a gap in the Malakwa community as they haven't had a pub before. Ray never wanted to see a typical pub built in Malakwa, he wanted something different. With his hard work, eye for detail and entrepreneurial spirit, Ray has created a place for his community and its guests that is more than just a pub.