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Back road to bliss; Take time to smell the roses. Focus on the journey, not the destination. Just slow down and enjoy the simple pleasures of daily living.

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Illustrations: Photo: Suzanne Morphet, Times Colonist / Hedge-lined back roads can lead to roadside stands of produce or views of curious cattle.

Photo: Suzanne Morphet, Times Colonist / Nancy Monahan long ago rejected the highways in favour of the slower but more interesting back roads.

Remember the above words of wisdom when you get in your car. Whether it's just driving around town or bringing visitors home from the airport, we can consciously choose the road less travelled, the scenic route, the slow road, and make every drive a journey.

My neighbour, Nancy Monahan, has made a point of it since she moved to the Saanich Peninsula from Victoria 10 years ago. Forget zooming down the Pat Bay Highway at 90 or 100 km per hour with 35,000 other cars on any given day. Nancy takes the back roads -- the roads that lead past lush farmland, through fragrant hedgerows and past stunning ocean vistas -- at a speed low enough to savour the views.

If there's a horse trailer in front of her, that may be only 50 km/hour. But that doesn't bother her: "I would never want to rush them or make them uncomfortable and plus, that's what this place is; it's agricultural, it comes with the territory."

And so what if it takes her 10 or 15 minutes longer to get to where she's going? Nancy put it this way as we got into her car one day recently to head to Victoria the back way: "When you save time [doing one thing], it doesn't add on to your life, it means that you are simply spending that time doing something else."

"Now if you're Albert Schweitzer or Madame Curie ... whose passions in life are so significant and so fulfilling that, yes, it would be brilliant to save 35 minutes a day because they could be applying that 35 minutes to something extremely important. ... But you know what? Most people would be watching television 35 more minutes a day or talking on the cellphone, not doing anything that really enriches their life."

Monahan is confident I'll find the back road worth my time. We start from Dean Park, just south of the airport and take East Saanich Road through the small village of Saanichton, past freshly cut fields of hay and ripening strawberries until we reach the intersection of Island View Road and the Pat Bay Highway.

We say adios to all the cars and trucks backed up on the highway as we cross it, then turn right onto Lochside Drive, just beyond Michell's farm market. This is where the drive gets really interesting. The rich black soil of the Martindale flats unfolds on both sides of the road, attesting to the great productivity of

these fields. Just up ahead, remote control airplanes are doing aerobatic stunts at the Michell airfield.

"It changes with the seasons," Monahan tells me. "In winter, this place turns into Ducks Unlimited ... a virtual lake, and there are thousands of birds here and sometimes you can also see hunting dogs training. ... The people will bring their Labs down; they've got the sock, the scent sock they train them with."

A left at Martindale Road takes us up to the top of this valley and alongside a kiwi farm and a row of Lombardy poplars rustling in the spring breeze. "Does this look like France, or what?" Monahan asks. "It's gorgeous, it's stunning." And I have to agree.

We turn right onto Welch Road and I'm even more charmed by the pastoral landscape; horses grazing in green pastures (and the occasional one on the road with its rider), hedgerows of fragrant hawthorn that conjure up memories of England in May, and glimpses of farm buildings framed in flowering clematis and garages draped in purple wisteria.

"This field is often in strawberries," says Monahan, and sure enough, almost before the words are out of her mouth, we see the ripening fruit dangling close to the ground. "And you can often get free-range eggs in the road side stands. It's the honour system; you just put your money in. This one has eggs today." But Monahan spoke too soon. As we get closer we realize the egg cartons don't contain eggs. "Oh, it's golf balls!" we realize in unison and burst out laughing.

A field of salt and pepper-coloured lambs reminds Monahan of an earlier period of her adult life on Lasqueti Island. "In the spring, we'd hear the baaaing of the lambs. They would get lost and separated from their mothers and so it would be this symphony, this constant, intense symphony of baaa and eeeeeh, baaaa, eeeee ... finally they would (find each other and) be silent. But then a few minutes later another pair would be separated and it would start all over again," she says with a chuckle.

We leave the farms of Central Saanich and enter Cordova Bay with its head-turning views of the ocean and beachside homes snuggled close together. It's easy to imagine we're driving along the French Mediterranean -- the water is sparkling and sailboats are bobbing along in the breeze.

From Royal Oak Drive, we have several choices. If we were heading to Oak Bay, we would take the cool and shady Mount Doug Parkway, then Shelbourne Street with its majestic boulevard lined with London plane trees. If we were heading downtown, we would take Blenkinsop Road, which connects to Cook Street and would take us all the way to Dallas Road. For Royal Oak/Broadmead we would turn right on Royal Oak Drive and enjoy the manicured flower beds along the way.

But we need go no farther today; I'm converted. I may not take the back roads every time I need to make a trip to Victoria, but I'll be taking them a lot more often. Since my initial trip with Monahan, I've discovered I can go from Sidney to the University of Victoria for my daughter's track and field meets in 45 minutes on the back roads and avoid the paralyzing, mood-altering traffic jams of the Pat Bay Highway and McKenzie Avenue.

Wait a minute. I shouldn't even be timing myself; driving the back roads is not about saving time, it's about slowing down and savouring the moment. And if there are roses to smell along the way, so much the better.

Suzanne Morphet is a freelance writer, editor and photographer who happily makes the daily commute to her home office on foot. Fast or slow, it takes about the same amount of time.