

## South Queen Charlotte Islands

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We were in Seattle this morning. At late afternoon Tom and I stand on a rocky beach on South Moresby Island, near where the tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands archipelago dead-ends into the empty Pacific. The sound of our last link to civilization echoes and then fades over the mountain pass to the north, leaving the lap of waves on our gravel beach and the freshening breeze sighing through the trees. Clouds scud just overhead, suggesting that today's showers would soon resume.

Welcome to the Queen Charlotte Islands of 1974, before the national park and before "Haida Guaii" and "Guaii Haanas" had meaning to anyone but speakers of the Haida language. In those days the Haida people seemed inclined to ignore their long-abandoned ancestral villages on the remote south islands along with the memories of decline and smallpox decimation, and showed little interest in protecting their spectacular carved cedar monuments there. For a century these totems and house posts had remained there alone to decay naturally, and hardly anyone went there to disturb them.



Though it seemed to us the edge of the known world on arriving, getting to the south Charlottes was easy if you had a folding kayak – simply book a couple of seats on the daily jet from Vancouver and charter a floatplane to take you the remaining fifty miles to the southern end of the archipelago. There wasn't even an airline baggage charge for our large pile of boat parts and camping gear.

By 1 pm we unloaded into drizzle at Sandspit airport in the central Charlottes. This had been constructed as a major military base during the war, and its acres of concrete were now lightly used. In the little terminal we were told that our Beaver floatplane was

standing by, but that our flight was on hold due to low visibility. There was nothing to do but wait.

So we walked, passing the home of Neil and Betty Carey just outside the airport entrance. Their recent article in *Alaska Magazine* was why we were here. These expatriate Americans were the chroniclers of the south Charlottes, having explored extensively in small boats. My last summer's adventure kayaking West Chichigoff Island in Alaska had hooked me on more of the same, and Neil Carey's pictures and descriptions of the lush

forests and abandoned Haida villages in the south Charlottes were all that Tom, another graduate student, and I needed to decide to go there.

We collected nautical charts and researched the history of the remote Haida villages, including a visit to Bill Holm, the foremost authority on Haida art history at the university's Burke Museum. He had actually been there. He led me to an article on the village of Ninstints, part of which is quoted later. We also wrote to the Careys for any advice they could offer. We received no reply – perhaps one of many inquiries from people longer on ambition than execution.



Returning to the terminal, the charter people, perhaps tiring of our pile of duffel in front of their desk, announced that conditions were now marginally suitable to fly. A forklift was summoned, our gear was loaded onto a pallet, and we followed it out to our aircraft. The Beaver is a fair sized aircraft, capable of taking much more than the two of us and our equipment. Standing on its pontoons and below that, the retractable landing gear, the Beaver's flight deck was nearly eight feet up, hence the advantage of the forklift.

Loaded up, we were ready. Tom climbed into the right seat, and I went into the back with our bags. The engine started up and without delay, we taxied away. We rolled across concrete aprons and taxiways toward a huge ramp that had served wartime PBY's coming and going from the sea. I had expected that we would likewise trundle down it, but before we got there, the pilot gave it the gas and we lifted off.

Conditions were truly barely suitable for flying. The cloud deck was several hundred feet above sea level, or less, so we cruised along just below or sometimes briefly in it. Rain squalls pounded the windscreen regularly, and we gently bounced and rocked in the eddies and swirls of the southerly wind. I watched my map carefully, eager to observe and remember landmarks for later. One in particular I remember – a singular and romantically named offshore pinnacle that I had tried to visualize poring over my charts. "All Alone Stone!" I exclaimed, and the pilot nodded.

We grumbled southward for a half hour, the pilot pointing out features here and there – Hot Springs Island, with a cabin and soaking pools, and logging camps on the bigger islands. The loggers were gradually stripping their way south. He showed us Dolomite Narrows, which would be our closest source of help should we need it – just a few squatters ("hippies") living there. We glimpsed a shake roof or two through the trees.

Now he advanced the throttle and we climbed toward a gap in the mountains that separated us from our destination at the south end of Moresby Island. Over the misty pass and then a long glide down to Liscombe Inlet ahead, gray and specked white from the wind off the open ocean to the south. Down to a few feet above the waves, we flew on toward a low island ahead as the pilot told us he would set us down in the little bay in the lee of the island. We settled into the quiet water there and idled toward the beach.

"One of you is going to have to wade and hold me off the beach." The pilot wasn't getting out. I took off my boots, rolled my pants to the knees, and climbed down to the pontoon as the engine stopped, and then dropped into the icy water – a shock, but I was glad for the numbing of my feet since the barnacled gravel wasn't comfortable. I pulled a pontoon in as close as possible without grounding it, and Tom leapt for the beach. The

pilot started handing bags to me, and I became very busy, since my job was both to pass them to Tom and simultaneously hold the large, heavy aircraft in position against the offshore wind. Soon it was done and I was directed to turn the plane to face seaward. After reassuring us that he'd keep an eye out for us, the pilot closed the door, started up, and was gone.

In my mental preview, I had looked forward to this very moment, but listening to our only link to humankind fade to nothing sent a cold chill down the back of my neck. We had no radio, and just a couple of flares for use in the off chance we might see a boat or a plane, both of which were unlikely in this out-of-the-way coast. So if we get stranded, sick, or hurt and can't deal with it on our own, we are screwed.

Which raised the first burning question: do we have a workable boat? This was a more vital question than it was at the beginning of last year's Alaska trip where we assembled the kayak in the city of Sitka. Here, if we'd forgotten something or a part had been broken in transit, there would be no running to the hardware store to fix it. As we opened our boat bags to find out, another rain shower commenced and the scrubby treetops to windward seemed to dance a little harder.

The boat went together as it was supposed to. It was the same as I'd used in Alaska – a double Folbot with a big plywood rudder and single large cockpit covered by a spray skirt with zip-up closures for each of us. Our gear was either stuffed ahead of Tom's feet in the front position or behind me in the rear one. Narrower duffel went along each side of us, so that we squeezed into confined but comfortable seats.

Ready to go, we zipped up extra tight as the rain continued, knowing the calm of our bay in the lee would cease as we rounded the island into the open inlet to the south. It was a poor day for paddling and we were barely able to make headway against the wind. We managed four miles down the west shore of the inlet before finding a quiet, pretty cove. Behind a smooth gravel beach was a carpet of moss under Sitka spruces making for a very comfortable camp.

The rain ceased after dinner and the seas on the inlet died to calm. A seal, apparently inexperienced with humans, curiously swam toward us until he frightened himself, dove in a panic, surfaced to seaward, to repeat again and again.

The next morning was beautifully clear and we headed for Anthony Island, site of the Haida village of Ninstints, which contained the most and best-preserved totems. (These place names have since been replaced with the longer and more complex Haida ones, but I'll continue with those used at the time.)

Our expectations were high as we drifted into the village cove, but as one by one, the totems came into view, we were stunned.



The Haida abandoned this village about the time my grandfather was born. For about a hundred years the totems here had withstood storms, rot, thieves, and vandals. Though the best of them were removed in 1957 for display in the Provincial Museum in Victoria, those that remained were totally vulnerable. We felt a heavy responsibility about that. Today the Haida Guaii Watchmen program looks out for this and other sites in the Charlottes, restraining visitors to gravel paths and interpreting the totems and house pits.



We camped four days on the beach directly in front of the village, sometimes peeking over our shoulders at the stern characters that seemed to glare down disapprovingly. I photographed and sketched, wandering around the multi-tiered house pits, and discovering nearly hidden wonders, like a small carved frog on a fallen totem nearly covered with moss in the brush. As I noted in my journal, “something, either a totem or a house post, is visible everywhere around here.” On the beach we found bits of what seemed to be European crockery, and we wondered about its history.



Important and tragic events did occur here in the early years of the Haida’s contact with Whites.

The following was taken from “Anthony Island, a Home to the Haidas”, Report to the Provincial Museum by William Duff and Michael Kew, Victoria, BC, about 1960. Duff and Kew were involved in removing the totems and surveying the village in 1957, and compiled their account from a variety of historical sources.

The Haida at Ninstints had been trading with English ships since about 1787, primarily for furs. The village was known as Koyah’s village, for its chief. Trading with Koyah and his people was friendly, especially with Captain Robert Gray in the Lady Washington (the replica of which is a common sight in northwest coastal waters today).

In 1791 the Lady Washington returned, now under the command of John Kendrick. When Koyah and others came on board, petty pilfering occurred (as it often did), but when his laundry hanging out to dry was taken, it was too much for Kendrick. He ordered Koyah’s leg to be clamped in a cannon mount and held him there until all of the stolen items were returned and all the furs ashore were brought out and purchased for the price he thought was right. Then the chief was released and the ship quickly departed.

What Kendrick regarded as a simple “lesson” must to Koyah have been a monstrous and shattering indignity. No Coast Indian chief could endure even the slightest insult without taking steps immediately to restore his damaged prestige. To be taken captive, even by a white man, was like being made a slave, and that stigma could be removed only by the greatest feats of revenge or distributions of wealth. This humiliating violation of Koyah’s person must have been shattering to his prestige in the tribe.

Unwisely, Kendrick returned to Ninstints just three days later! Trading seemed to resume normally but after fifty Haida had boarded the ship, Koyah and the villagers took control and forced the crew below. Unfortunately for him, Koyah delayed in taking further action beyond taunting Kendrick. The crew had time to collect firearms and other weapons and retook the ship, slaughtering forty to sixty Haida either on deck or as they fled in canoes, without any injuries of their own.



*The effect on Koyah’s prestige of the second defeat can only be surmised. Like the hero of a Greek tragedy, he was pitted against forces stronger than his own, but he had to continue the struggle...And struggle he did. For one thing, he immediately went to war against Chief Skidegate’s tribe. Then, during the next four years, he attacked three more ships. Twice he was successful, overpowering and killing the crews. The third time, however, his attack was repulsed and he himself was killed. This record of four attacks – two successful and two disastrous – established Koyah as the most warlike chief on the whole coast at this time...No other chief succeeded in capturing more than one ship, and his successes probably encouraged others to make similar attempts. His failures fanned the hatred on both sides.*

The authors point out that there are several conflicting and inconsistent additions to the account from other sources, so exactly what happened may never be known. The results, however, were tragically clear. Unlike chiefs in the other villages that continue to bear their name, Koyah’s lineage and name faded and the village became known by the name of one of its last lineages of chiefs, Ninstints. The population on Anthony Island declined steadily and then precipitously with the widespread smallpox epidemic of 1862 and others that followed. By the 1880’s the last permanent residents moved to Skidegate.

Having read about these events beforehand, camping at Ninstints, though fascinating, was not comfortable for me. All the sadness and rancor that had happened here was never far from my mind, always with the brooding totems watching us as a reminder.



We explored the rest of Anthony Island, including a circumnavigation and returning several times to a little cove on the south end. It had a spectacular view south along Kunghit Island to Cape St. James, and was surrounded by very rugged rocks. On top of these were auklet burrows, smelling strongly of fish.

We also tried a little foraging to spice up our mundane dried cuisine. I made a crab trap out of two bows of cedar branches, covered with a piece of derelict net, and joined in the middle so it would fold in half when pulled up, trapping the crabs feeding on the clam bait in the middle. We took it out to the center of the cove in the morning and returned to harvest our catch in the afternoon. It was

incredibly heavy to pull up, but instead of a seething mass of crabs, there was only a fat multi-armed starfish enjoying the bait. So much for crabbing.

After four days at Ninestints we moved on to Rose Harbour. This was the site of a whaling station that operated from the turn of the century until 1940, and now uninhabited. It was a beautiful but sad place – lots of derelict buildings, whalebone, harpoon heads, and big boilers for rendering the blubber. The bugs were awful. Rose Harbour is a lot different today, with a lodge, restaurant, and kayak rentals and guides.



The next morning we went on north and around the peninsula into Skincuttle Inlet. We made 20 miles due to calm seas and a light following wind. I had made a little 2 by 4 foot square sail that had a pocket to fit over a paddle blade. We took turns holding the “mast” aloft while the other paddled. The high point was sailing around Benjamin Point while we ate lunch. Crossing Carpenter Bay we clocked ourselves at four knots – very good for our boat.

We pulled into Jedway for the night – an abandoned open-pit mine, “a forsaken gravel heap” as I described it, but a fair campsite. In the evening I hiked up the road to the open pit area where I was able to see east over Ikeda Cove and west over Skincuttle Inlet.

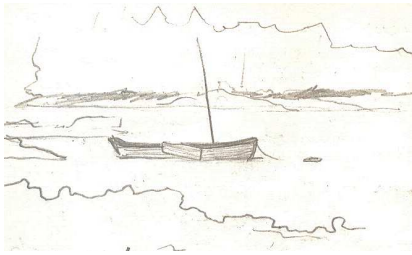
In the morning we crossed the inlet to Burnaby Island, and spotted some huts on the beach in Swan Bay. On going ashore I was introduced to a way of life that would leave a lasting impression on me for many years and strongly affect the meaning of sea kayaking for me.



Tom and Tory lived in cabins they had built from driftwood and cedar shakes scavenged from the beach. They were squatters – just one of many back-to-the-land young people from many nations who took advantage of the BC government’s *liaise-faire* management (seemingly none at all) along the rainforest coast. These people formed dispersed communities in places like Florencia Bay and Flores Island near Tofino on Vancouver Island, and the east side of Moresby Island in the Charlottes. We would meet many of them in the next week.

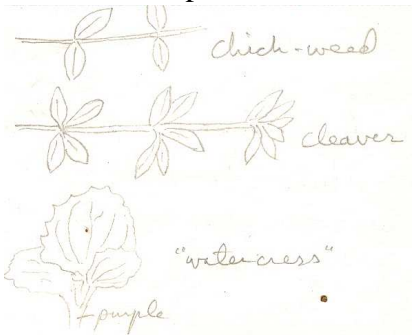
Though this couple lived in Swan Bay alone, they were only a few miles from others like them in Dolomite Narrows. That was a good thing since Tory was expecting a baby in just a few days. The local acupuncturist from Dolomite Narrows would come to assist and had already delivered several children there.

We stayed 24 hours at Swan Bay, learning about how they lived. They had arrived in an 18-foot sailing canoe (carrying about 1,500 pounds of supplies initially), which they kept anchored in the bay. Occasional shopping trips were made in the canoe. It took about four traveling days to Moresby Landing where they could get a ride to Queen Charlotte City.



Their houses were pentagonal and had a small sleeping loft. They were covered with cedar shakes split from logs on the beach. As is common on beaches not exposed to open sea, small driftwood for fuel was limited, so they burned green alder cut from nearby trees in their wood stove, which seemed to work ok.

We learned about foraging, going with Tom to collect salad greens off the lushly covered nurse logs in the forest. These included chickweed, cleaver, and “pineapple weed”, which may have been chamomile. I still have samples of all these pressed in my journal. They also collected small spruce buds, the inside of a thistle (like celery) and stinging nettles rendered harmless and delicious by steaming. We also tried what the Haida call “gau” – dried ribbon kelp that spawning fish had covered with roe. Toasted a little it was like excellent potato chips. It was illegal for Whites to harvest it, mainly because the Japanese would love to import all of it.



Tom and Tory were not meat-eaters, but due to her advanced pregnancy, Tory was having a strong craving for it. Three or four Sitka deer were frequently hanging around their cabin, munching on the downed alder leaves or sometimes just staring in through the door. Tom had a .22 rifle he had never fired, but this morning he had been thinking that if the deer showed up, he was going to shoot one. When they arrived, he took it as a sign it was meant to be, and loaded the rifle while Tory sharpened the butcher knife, watched by a buck just a few feet outside the door. He couldn't miss with a shot between the eyes and the buck dropped like a rock. The others gave a start, and then

went to see why their colleague had suddenly decided on a nap. Soon they were back to browsing while we hung up the carcass for butchering.



As soon as we started, their cat went wild, yowling and rubbing on our legs. Tom saved the heart and liver, figuring the latter would be particularly good for Tory. But the heart promptly vanished, stolen by the cat. We had an excellent stew that night, and they gave us a forequarter which we carried and finished over the next several days. We gave them some candy bars and a book.

About noon the next day we departed for Dolomite Narrows and north. Tom marked out several good cabins that we could use along the way if not occupied.

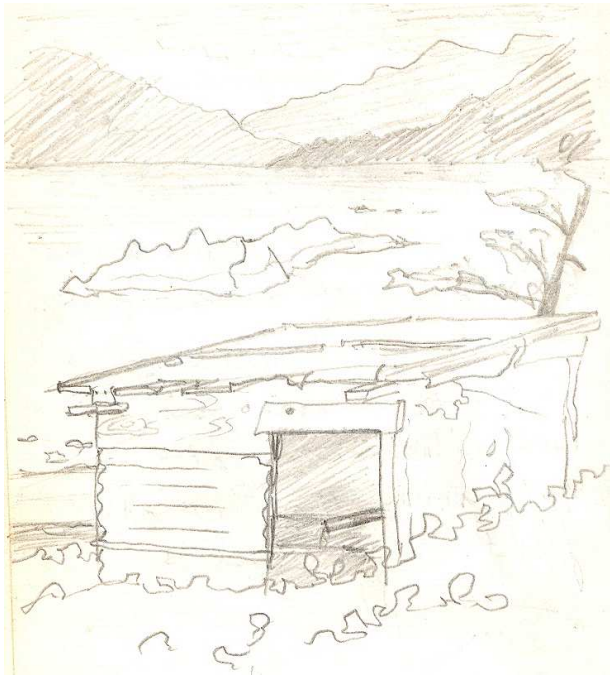
So what became of Tom and Tory? Sixteen years later this clue emerged in the Burnett Bay cabin journals, written by a prominent and very well traveled kayak designer who had been to the Charlottes at some point after us:

*August 2000 ...There used to be another wonderful gazebo-shaped cabin at Swan Bay in the Charlottes ...the woman who raised three or four children in this cabin now has had the distinction somewhat to the effect of being the leading Winnebago sales person in the US...*

Coming into Dolomite Narrows we encountered two women and some children picking glasswort. Also known as beach asparagus, it is crisp and a bit salty, and very good either raw or cooked. They canned it for later. There were a half-dozen or so cabins here for several families and assorted single people that came and went. The local acupuncturist/astrologer was also building a 25-foot dory out of chain-sawn red- and Alaska cedar. It looked rough, but impressive given the circumstances.

After lunch we set out for our next destination – Hot Springs Island. It was about fifteen miles north, so this would be a long day. The weather was beautiful – sunny and a light west wind. Our next question was how to cross Juan Perez Sound, the shortest crossing was five miles, but out of our way. The most direct route was seven miles of open water, and we opted for that. This route would also take us past my object of curiosity – All Alone Stone.

The wind was quartering off our stern, so we raised the sail. I had now made a mast, which held the sail a little higher and allowed us both to paddle. It took only about a half hour to cover the two miles to All Alone Stone. No place for a break here – it was only a hundred yards long and very steep, sitting miles from anything else. We went on toward Ramsey Island. The wind now freshened considerably and the seas built to three feet. I shipped several of them over my lap and got wet as water leaked through the skirt zipper. We made Ramsey Island at 6:30 pm, completing the 6 ½ mile distance in an hour and a half – over four knots! Not bad for a long haul.

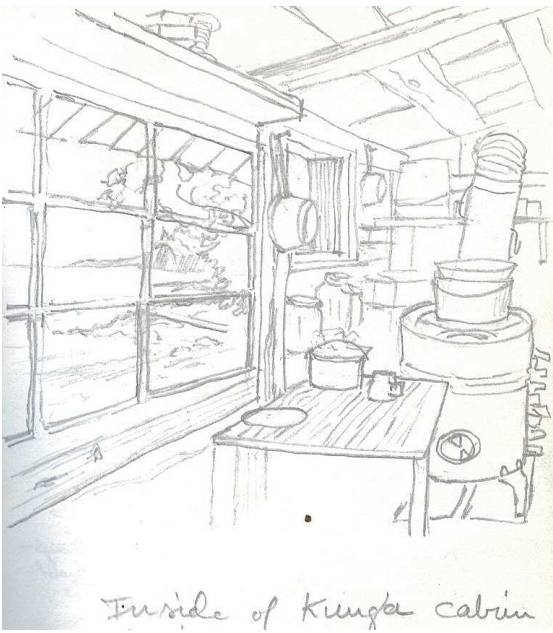


We arrived soon after at Hot Springs Island, totally beat. It was worth it. There was a bathhouse with a tub and two pipes: lukewarm and very hot. You could get just what you wanted by adjusting the two. The only problem was that we couldn't find any water that wasn't sulfurous, so in the morning we paddled back to Ramsey with aching arms to get some. The rest of the day was relaxation in the sun. We gathered goosetongue (seaside plantain) and glasswort, fried up some of our venison and poured onion gravy over it, served with steamed glasswort, which was like string beans, but better! Had that with a goosetongue, thistle, and chickweed salad seasoned with reconstituted minced onions and vinegar and oil. Desert followed – chocolate pudding, brandy, and coffee. The best dinner ever.

We spent two nights at Hot Springs, resting, observing, and fantasizing about the lifestyles we seen in this beautiful place. In the early afternoon four fishing boats arrived with eight people to take baths. We were already packing up and left by mid afternoon. The fishing boats passed us later and swung in close for a look – kayaks were still a unique sight.

Camped that night at Gogit Point on Lyell Island – a fantastic spot with plenty of dry moss to lounge on. Walking south from the campsite I found a canoe drag-way, where the rocks had been moved aside all the way down to the low tide line. We figured the Haida parked their canoes here rather than in front of the obvious camp area where the tide flat was much longer.

Had another dinner extravaganza of the remaining venison, dried oxtail soup, glasswort, and goosetongue. Made banana bread in two pans in the coals for desert.



*Inside of Kunga cabin*



The next morning was intermittent rain with a southeast wind, and we had a nice ten-mile paddle-sail up to Kunga Island. On the way two seaplanes buzzed us, but not our Beaver. We were heading for Kunga cabin, a neat, tiny structure whose builder and sole occupant was somewhere else. The 8 by 10 floor area was just big enough for Tom on the single bunk and me on the floor next to the wood stove.

The next morning we went directly across the channel to Tanu village site, now another Haida Guaii Watchmen location. There were no totems here, but there was a well-preserved house pit with the two-level sleeping shelves around the edges, and one standing house post with a beam still in the mortise at one end.



Walking south, I found a gravestone on a little hill, inscribed only with “In Memory of Charlie” and two shaking hands. Really touched me somehow. There were signs that this and other graves nearby had been dug up at some point.

As I sat looking at the stone, I saw a river otter about twenty feet away. He was lying on his back on the moss, wriggling and chuffing as he dried and scratched his back. Then he got up, shook, and trundled back to the beach. A very strangely shaped animal ashore.

One of the pleasures of kayak trips, especially in the early days, was that rounding the next point may bring the totally unexpected. So it was, as we crossed to Louise Island and entered Thurston Harbour. It was a logging camp. I’m not sure why we decided to stop there – a group of trailers and mobile metal buildings surrounded by dismal clearcuts, and marked with a sign “Thurston Harbour Tree Farm”. We tied up at the float in late afternoon and were met by two off-duty loggers, Dave and Jeremy, who told us we were just in time for dinner.

We followed them to the cookhouse where we were welcomed with a sumptuous dinner. I don't remember what it was other than that my journal reported its excellence and that there was apple pie for desert. Then, most welcome of all, we took showers in the bunkhouse. Dave and Jeremy took us to the beer hall for warm suds, which didn't impress us very much. The friendliness and generosity of these people certainly did.

Following the beers, we had farewell and paddled on in a glassy calm evening through a beautiful sunset, heading for Vertical Point which was about six miles distant, and arrived at dark.

There was a cabin here that Tom at Swan Bay had told us about – a tiny “houselet” built by an artist named Benita who spent most of her time somewhere else. Benita's house was six by eight feet, with a screened porch about the same size. Built from dimension lumber, it contained a stove, single bed, and table or additional bed on the adjacent wall and overlapping the bed – just enough room for the two of us.

There were two people already camped at Vertical Point when we arrived, though not using the cabin. They were also in a kayak and lived like Tom and Tory in a cabin elsewhere on Burnaby Island to the south. They were returning from a shopping trip in Queen Charlotte City. He was Renye, which I've doubtlessly misspelled, a French-Canadian from James Bay. She was Adriatique, originally from Argentina. She was in her third trimester of pregnancy.

As we arrived and carried up our boat and gear, Renye warned us that the biggest spring tide of the year would occur that night. I stowed the boat on some ancient drift logs at the back of the beach that appeared to have been there forever, laid the paddles across the cockpit, and went off to bed.

We awoke to find the little cove completely dry, that all of the logs on the beach had been rearranged, and that our boat was vanished. Renye shook his head – we had been warned. We stood in shock. What now? With no radio we'd have to wait here until a fishing boat happened by, or for Renye to pass the word to someone, hopefully before Fall. My humiliation was complete.

But then – oh joy! We saw it lodged on a point about a half-mile away where it had grounded on the falling tide at the last point before floating out into Hecate Strait. Had there been any wind last night it surely would have been long gone.

I took this lesson to heart, and except when parking my boat in the forest, always tied it securely on the back logs regardless of springs or neaps. But it did happen again, though in a different way, which a short digression will explain.

Years later, during my era of exemplary kayaking author and instructor, I made a solo trip to Vancouver Island's Broken Group in January, my preferred time of year out there. I landed in the south cove at Clark Island, one island in from the group's Pacific fringe. Pulling up the bow as far as I could without unloading, I walked up the beach to decide on where to camp, here by the old chimney or out on the point. After perhaps a minute I decided on the point, and turned to move the boat down the beach. But it was now a hundred feet off the beach and rapidly heading for Coaster Channel in the light breeze. Take heed: in the winter the huge Pacific swells can create a local surge, like a mini-tsunami, not a wave, just a steady, silent rise in water level across the whole cove, with an equal fall and backflow to follow. Later I watched it happen again, and saw the sea rise several feet and then fall again over the period of about a minute.

I was ashore with nothing. I usually carry up my “purse” – a small dry bag with emergency materials such as fire starter, multi-purpose tool, and a Space Blanket, along with wallet, car keys, etc. Not this time – it was still sitting in the cockpit. I was wearing my rubber knee-boots, quick drying pants, pile tops and paddle jacket, spray skirt, PFD, and Gore-Tex hat. I would have been marooned here for at least three days, the time I did stay, and saw no one.

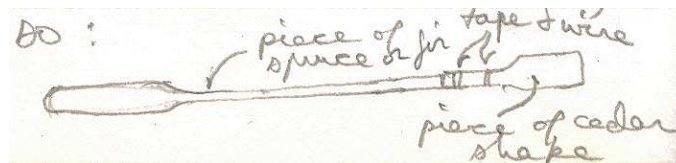
So I waded and then swam until I could grab the bow toggle and tow it back to the beach. I wasn't really cold from it, and after dumping the water out of my boots most of my clothes were dry by the time I had unloaded and the camp set up with my wood stove going in the tent. It certainly could have been far worse with my lack of immersion protection (that's another story) if I had turned to look after the boat a minute or two later. At what point would I have decided not to swim for it?

Anyhow, back to 1974's Lesson One. We trudged around the cove and out to the point to retrieve our ill-deserved gift from the sea. As expected, there were no paddles in sight. So we took up pieces of driftwood and went out through the extensive kelp beds to look for them. The varnished shaft and blades blended perfectly with the kelp fronds and hoses. Still, we found one of them. The other was gone forever.



We returned to Vertical Point. Renye had been taking advantage of the minus tide to catch an octopus. About then a woman named Becky arrived in a kayak. She lived in Queen Charlotte City and was traveling solo to visit friends in the community around Burnaby Island. Becky expertly pounded the skinned tentacles on a log with the back of her axe and then fried them up for us all in soy sauce and butter. Outstanding, and not tough or rubbery as is its reputation.

Later in the morning when the tide came up, Renye and Adriatique loaded up and headed on to their cabin. As the picture shows, the boat was heavily laden and for this trip Renye had come all the way south with his feet on deck, since he was carrying a French horn he had purchased in the cockpit. One may scoff, but they had been surviving down here for several years, and knew to adjust when and by what route they paddled. I had nothing but admiration for them.



I set to work making a new paddle out of a piece of spruce and a cedar shake, both off the beach. I wired and taped the cedar blade

in place. The result was so light and effective that we both vied for a chance to use it on the way to Sandspit, where I sawed it in half to take home for a keepsake and reminder about spring tides.

At the next morning's minus tide I searched around for another octopus without luck. We settled for horse clams. Tom grabbed the neck while I dug. We skinned and pounded the neck, but it was still tough after frying.

We also paddled out to the Limestone Islands where we found a spectacular natural amphitheater ravine, focused on a huge spruce and with the most luxurious moss we'd yet seen underfoot.



The next day we went on to Skedans, now another Watchmen-protected village site. There were several standing totems, though not as well preserved as at Ninstints. But there was one fallen one that was in excellent condition, with a figure lying on its back with a R.I.P. bouquet of salal in its hands. Sadly, loggers had stripped the forest to the very village edge, and the logger and his wife lived in a trailer there, surrounded by oil drums and refuse.

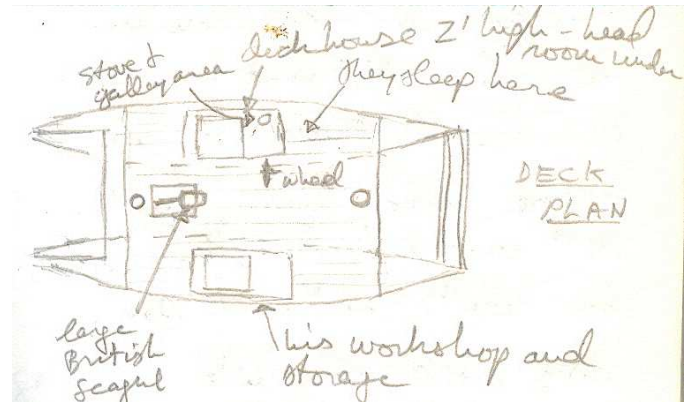
We stayed some distance to the south in a fisheries cabin. We explored some nearby limestone caves that were quite extensive. Some of these were

wave-cut, but well above the normal water level. Far at the back was a collection of large driftwood, attesting to the awesome size of winter storm waves.



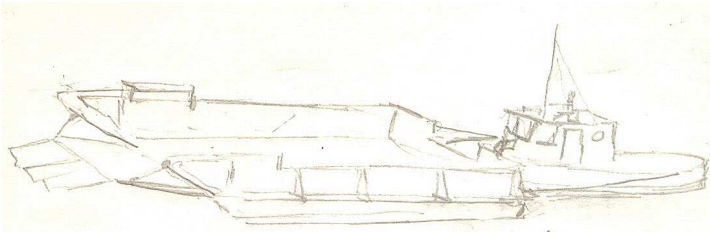
As we departed, a sailing catamaran came in to anchor at Skedans. It had been built by Godfrey Stephens, a well-known sculptor from Victoria. Many parts were salvaged from

wrecks, and all of it was oiled with pine tar rather than painted. It was about 35 feet long and 20 feet wide, with lots of deck space. Space in the hulls was much more cramped. Godfrey had his workshop in one hull and he and his companion Neva lived in the other. They were exploring south, and we were able to give them pointers about places and edible plants while they cooked us grilled cheese sandwiches on their little wood range. I heard later that Godfrey cruised the BC coast for years in his catamaran, until it broke up off the west coast of the Charlottes.



We headed north for our last campsite before Sandspit. We found a large rushing stream to camp by, and took water from it to cook our pasta dinner. We served it up and discovered that it was saltwater! The stream was actually the reversing outlet from a tidal lagoon. Another lesson – taste it first. After choking down our dinner, I walked a mile along abandoned logging roads in this flat country looking for water, but found nothing other than a few puddles.

We were on the water at 7 am for our run to Sandspit, since the weather was rainy and a bit windy from the south. It was easy at first, but freshened as we went along. We put up the sail and were pushed along so fast that paddling made no difference. The seas built behind us and I shipped a few into the cockpit, but we kept going. At the airport they told us that it had been blowing over thirty knots. We rounded the spit in very shallow water and landed at the airport only about 300 yards from our point of departure.



MITCO ferry between  
Alliford Bay and Skidegate

Since we were a day early, we stowed our gear at the terminal and went into Queen Charlotte City for the night, taking the barge-ferry across Skidegate Inlet. A nice re-entry – we met a lot of interesting people there living innovative lives, mainly on boats they had built or maintained themselves.

That concludes the story. I haven't been back to the south Charlottes and probably won't. By necessity, it

is now vastly changed. Fortunately the voracious logging that was churning southward along Moresby Island has been stopped. The free-spirited community and their dwellings there are all gone. The resurgence of BC's First Nations' sovereignty over their cultural resources and the exponential growth of interest in visiting Guu' Haanas, mainly by kayak, have resulted in a climate of intense management. All of that is necessary. I'm just glad to have seen it before it was.