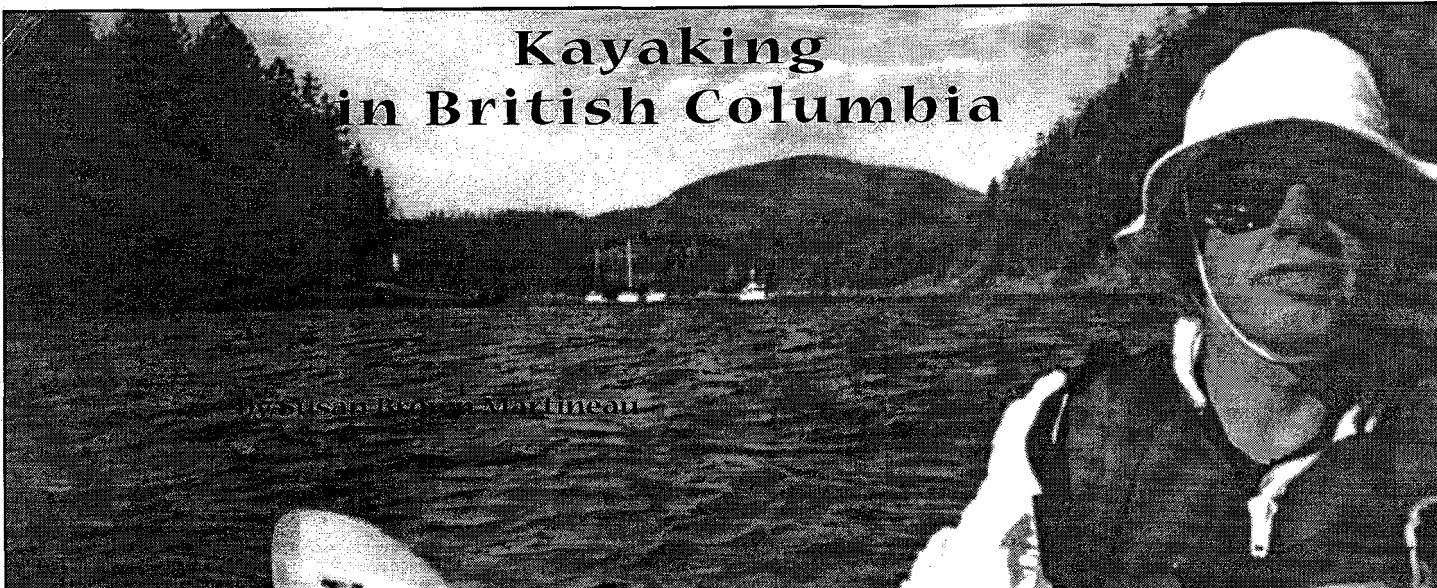


Kayaking in British Columbia



By Susan Keenan-Martineau

Harv Mastalir Paddling Through Hole in the Wall at Slack Tide

Hole in the Wall

We only saw one sail boat. We didn't know if we were there at the right time or not. The water was mixed like in a river eddy. There were no big rapids. I turned around to Harv and said I guess we're one of the only ones going through this morning. But behind Harv was a line up of boats. Over the next 10 minutes we counted 30 boats. We had made it a little bit ahead of time.

We were in the middle of Hole in the Wall. A narrow water passage from one place to another on our trip around the Discovery Islands in British Columbia. Before embarking on our trip, a young woman who had talked with us as we loaded our boat, announced that she would never in her life go through Hole in the Wall. Her husband might do it later in the summer, but nothing would ever get her to do that.

I pondered that statement. My first time in British Columbia, my first time on big water. I wondered if I should be doing this. We had decided that when Harv and I did this trip, we would use the double, to help deal with any waves or weather that might get too big. The tidal rapids had loomed large in my imagination at that point.

But here were Harv and I in the middle of Hole in the Wall. The water had calmed down to a lake appearance. We had entered the passage about 20 minutes ahead of schedule for slack water and had encounter just eddy-like water. The water I was so familiar with on rivers in the Rockies. What was the big deal?

The big deal is that during those times when you have millions of gallons of

ocean shifting its place, rapids develop, big rapids, huge rapids and whirlpools.

So much water that a passage known as Seymour Narrows, which was about 30 miles to the west, has lost huge motor driven ships not just during the tidal rapids. All this was beginning to make sense. You time these passages right; and you go from a river rapid at spring flood to the Boulder Reservoir in the early morning. It is all a matter of timing.

It wasn't that hard to do. We got it right every time. We had passed through Surge Narrows two days before. We had made a camp about 30 minutes from the passage. We set out and passed several sailboats motoring through the passage. Even the boats with power time these passages right.

The tide tables at first looked daunting. Pages and pages of numbers. What did they mean? After some study we figured out the system. We had to figure in the daylight savings component and make adjustments for our specific location. From these tide tables we were also able to estimate when high and low would occur so we could time our comings and goings with the boat.

The Gorilla and the GIT

Which leads me to another adventure inside our adventure to British Columbia, which was dealing with our 300 pound loaded double, commonly referred to as "The Boat." The name comes from the 170- pound motoring system (at least two horsepower) in the back--that helps give the term some validity. Our singles are referred to as the kayaks.

It was important to time the tide fluctua-

tions, because at times we had an 18 foot tide variation to deal with. Dragging 300 pounds through mud, even with wheels, over a quarter of a mile was no picnic.

When you have a GIT, (Gorilla in Training), who cannot lift half of a 300 pound loaded double, then even more planning with loading and unloading the boat goes into effect. In fact, to the horror of our 170-pound motoring system, commonly known as "The Gorilla," we were both relegated to behaving like the GIT who takes many small loads to move a large load.

Now I have to admit, The Gorilla did find some philosophical insight into doing this. I think the first conceptual break about our differences, was when The Gorilla suggested to the GIT after several days of watching in frustration; why she was not crushing her tuna cans to make them into smaller units to pack.

Well, the GIT had never in her 47 years ever considered crushing a tuna can. They were small enough. Especially since these were the single-lunch size. She had only crushed a steel can when her foot was surrounded by a large hiking boot.

He paused, reflected, and he got it. My hands are not as strong as his!! In fact they are much smaller. Certainly not designed for crushing tuna cans.

We got better at figuring out how to load and unload the boat with the tide. After getting out at a campsite and walking a quarter of a mile to the shore, we pondered how much to bring to shore. I suggested letting the tide bring the boat in. We got a few snacks and cool beverages. We spent several hours watching the boat come in. Now this place was very protected. An absurdly long mud flat with no



Harv chatting with curious travelers about The Boat while waiting for the ferry

chance of wakes sending the boat to sea. However, we did figure out fairly early into our trip, that an anchor would have greatly helped these efforts.

Other campsites were more of a challenge. When we got to North Rendezvous Island, at low tide again, we had to haul everything up barnacle covered rock. The GIT held the boat in the waves, while The Gorilla unloaded the boat. After taking the major load out we lifted the boat up on to the rocks, tripped along over the rough rocks and then put it on wheels for the final run to the campsite.

How High Will the Tide Get?

This brings us to another new challenge. Figuring out how high the tide will

get? Being an amateur botanist for about 20 years, I started identifying different plants and making a guess if they could live in salt water. This proved faulty. Some lovely delicate daisies, which I judged not worthy of salt water, were dancing in the brine before dark. Some lush dark green grass seemed to luxuriate in the stuff.

One of the best indicators seemed to be barnacles. They only were evident when they were surrounded by salt water at least twice a day. In British Columbia the rainfall is so much that trees grow right to the water line. Campsites can be hard to find.

At one site, the campsite and a cooking area were all built up with gravel and logs. As we were deciding where to put our tent, we noticed the cooking area was about 12 inches lower than the tent site.

We decided higher. Which later turned out to be a good thing, because the cook site was swimming in water at high tide that night.

In fact that night, we are proud to say we camped on the water. The high tide came up to the logs that had been laboriously placed by previous campers. Water was 6 inches from our tent floor.

We also learned to tie up the boat no matter what. The night of the high tide, we had the boat on wheels and kept rolling it to higher and higher ground. Always tied up.

Wake Up-- and See the Wakes!!

We had a long day of paddling. Our planned campsite turned out to be a Disneyland filled with large sailboats with not much chance of a quiet experience. We paddled on. The wind came up. We made a crossing. A spot on shore looked good. We parked and tied up the boat. We walked around on the rocks looking for a camp spot up the hill. Nothing looked good. There were no flat areas

We walked back to the boat. We saw the large tour boat that we had seen before go slowly motoring by. We were just grabbing on to the boat when we were hit by a big wave. The boat lurched towards us. We both held on. I had my paddle on a leash in one hand and the boat cockpit in the other. Another hit. My paddle got stuck under the boat. We managed to get the paddle into the cockpit before a bigger wave hit. This took both of us to keep the boat from turning over. Another few hits and we managed to keep the boat up. The boat got some new scrapes on the hull. Harv got cut on his leg.



Room with a View - Standing at the Edge of Our Campsite on a Rising Tide - North Rendezvous Island

We found it important to keep looking at the water. It has lots of information. Or like they said in Kindergarten Cop, just like a kindergarten class, you never turn your back on the ocean.

The Ultimate Value of a Double

It was our last day. We had a day and a half of rest waiting for better weather and recovering from a portage with The Boat. I had spent the day before listening on our VHF radio; Cape Lazo reports 2-3-foot waves, Cape Mudge- 4-foot waves, small craft warning. My little gray cells were a bit worried. Not Harv, it will calm down he said and we will have fine weather.

My experience after living 13 years in the mountains of Colorado, was that when a storm passed, it was usually followed by some pretty strong winds as it moved out.

We set out on that morning from our secluded cove. We motored along with sail boats as they were leaving. We paused at the start of the crossing. Do we go south to the ferry or make the several hour crossing around several points? The wind was coming from the north. The water at the points would be protected from the wind.

We took off for the points. Within, I would say 20 minutes, the weather shifted. We had squalls coming from the south. We were getting wet. Harv had decided to wear his cotton hat, being optimistic. I had donned my new rain hat anticipating rain. After almost an hour we managed to find a stopping place on an island. We pondered the weather. For awhile, anyway we would be protected by the islands. We paddled on.

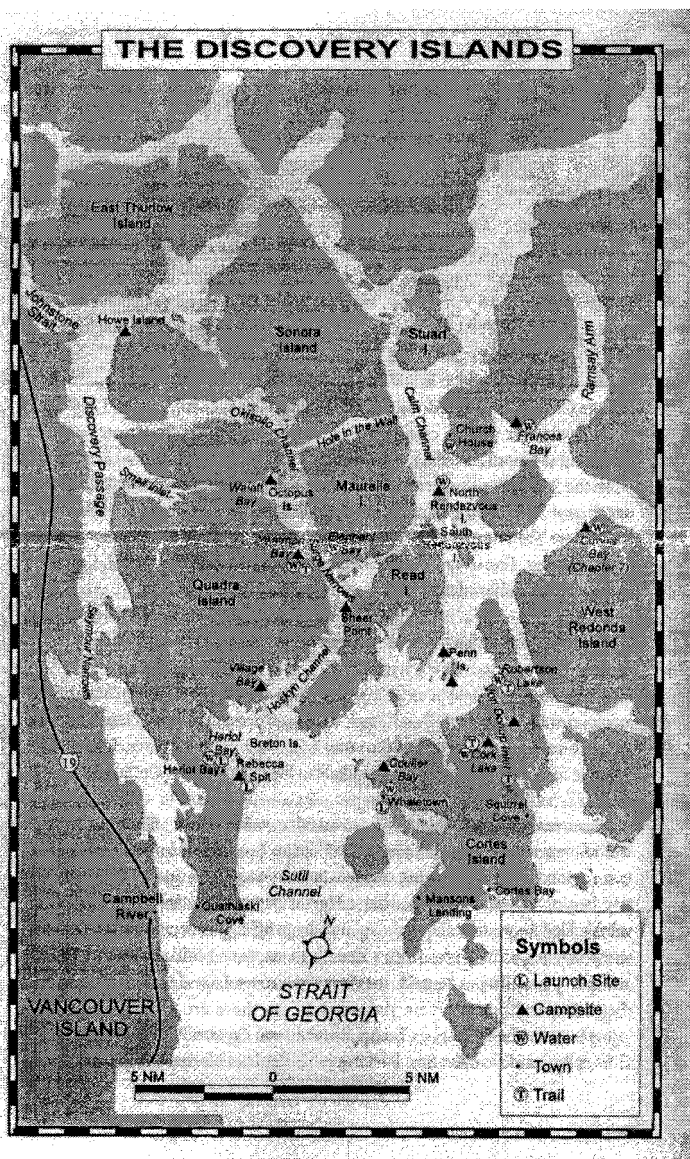
Coming out into the main channel now, the wind was kicking up the waves. We were at the north end of the Georgia Strait which is about 100 miles long. That makes for some fetch. As we rounded our first point, I experienced true rebound waves for the first time. I was feeling overwhelmed. We kept heading southwest. Around more points. We needed a break. We paddled into a little cove and took a rest.

Our options were to paddle on around

several more points or to cross the strait and take the ferry back. *That* option was looking good. But on thinking what are we here for, we opted to go on.

The waves got bigger. We were taking water all over our deck. I had water covering my face as waves would break. The front of the boat would crash down as it went from the top to the bottom of a wave.

We managed to continue on and paddle to our put in. I was pretty frazzled by then but Harv, of course, was quite happy with the big waves. 4-foot waves Harv said. I was hearing that on the radio yesterday.



If we had been in singles, we would have paddled down the strait along the shore and taken the ferry across. The double made it possible to do the crossing. After settling down, we reviewed how well the double had managed. At no time did the boat lurch, sway or tip. It was rock steady. Amazing. We cherish our new double.

The Water Highway

I love traveling on ferries. I had been to the Northwest several years before to attend a workshop on Cortez Island. I had to take a ferry from the mainland to Vancouver Island, then to Quadra Island, then to Cortez. By the time I got there I knew I had crossed some water.

Surprisingly enough, we took a similar route on this trip. We put in at Quadra Island and actually camped on Cortez Island for several days in a torrential rain.

I finally got the fact that the water ways in the Northwest are highways. One out of four people in Vancouver own a boat. It's the way to get around. In many cases, I think, they are substitutes for the RVs we see so much of in the West.

The Friendliest People in the World

We consistently ran into friendly people on our trip; from our ferry trips to campsites. We visited with the owner of Comox Kayaks on Vancouver Island, who had sold us our double. He directed us to his kayaking guide on Quadra Island who turned out to be a real sweetheart. He offered us a place to pack our boat and the VHF number for a quick water shuttle back if we needed it.

On our first night out we camped in a cove that had no trespassing signs everywhere. Our map showed a camping spot. A fellow out fishing from a nearby house came by and suggested that we spend the night in the cabin up the hill. Across the water, he relayed where the key might be hidden. We didn't find it but were moved by his offer.

After our trip we stayed at several B&Bs on the mainland and had a wonderful time. The

hosts were full of good tips, stories and humor.

We are planning to go back to the Northwest next year. And maybe the next. You should too—Eh?

Map from: Kayak Routes of the Pacific Northwest Coast.