

# Sechart Whaling Station Lodge

**Barkley Sound,  
Vancouver  
Island,  
BC**

**By Jerry Krenz**



Sechart Whaling Station Lodge at the foot of the mountains.

A kayaking paradise! An exaggeration? Perhaps, but it comes extremely close to being a paradise for kayakers---a Mecca of the northwest.

During September I spent a week at the Sechart Whaling Station Lodge located behind the Broken Group Islands of Barkley Sound on the Pacific shore of Vancouver Island. Rain or shine, I, along with others staying at the lodge, paddled every day and generally all day.

I "discovered" the lodge while exploring Vancouver Island in July. This was a driving trip, with kayak, stopping wherever and whenever I was attracted by the water. I had been to Tofino and paddled to Vargas Island staying at the Vargas Inn and Hostel. Returning from Tofino, I stopped at the tourist information center in Ucluelet. Except for their limited information on kayaking, Canadian centers are generally very helpful.

I learned about the Lady Rose Marine Service that operates a ferry between Port Alberni and Ucluelet. In addition, they

have a lodge on Barkley Sound. My next stop, heading to Victoria, was the ferry dock in Port Alberni. Unfortunately, I didn't have time for an excursion to the Whaling Station Lodge since I was scheduled to meet up with my son in Covallis.

I returned home to Colorado with thoughts of the trip not taken and spent the month of August moping about it. Finally, I guess I was becoming impossible, and my wife said GO! I booked a United flight to Vancouver and then a commuter flight on KD Air to Qualicum Beach.

The second flight was on an eight seat Piper Navajo which provided a marvelous view of the Strait of Georgia from its cruising altitude of 2000 feet. KD Air had surface transportation from Qualicum Beach to Port Alberni since the frequent fog at Port Alberni made regular air service problematic.

I arrived at the lodge the next day, only 24 hours after leaving DIA (much faster than driving). Sechart is the site of an early 1905 to 1917 whaling station which did its

share in causing the demise of the North Pacific whale population. The Lodge is the former office building of the M&B pulp mill in Port Alberni. The 114 foot long by 34 foot wide building was moved by barge the 35 nautical miles to Sechart the spring of 1995. The building has been remodeled into a comfortable, but down to earth, basic lodge without frills. This was its second season of operation.

The hosts at the lodge were Henk and Karey; Henk handling the physical aspects including the electrical power, and Karey overseeing the kitchen and the running of the lodge. The lodge was run very informally; the meals were buffet style with all you can eat. At dinner the main topic of conversation was kayaking---either the trip one had taken that day or the trip planned for tomorrow.

During my one week stay, I managed to weave through most of the Islands of the Broken Group. For one trip, three of us had Henk take us by water taxi to Gilbert Island on the outer edge of the Broken

Group, a six mile trip. This island, as is the case with several islands of the group, had a beautiful camp site complete with composting toilets. From campers, a five dollar camping fee is collected daily! We paddled toward Battley Island, two miles away, guided by the barking of a colony of sea lions that occupied the island. We had several close-up views while paddling through the channel adjacent to the island and thankfully no unfriendly encounters.

At various times we could see the swell of open water through the channel. We paddled back to the lodge past numerous islands and had a brief encounter with a rather fierce wind from our side. It was a full day of paddling and in addition to our sea lion viewing we covered about 10 miles.

On another day, four of us paddled south passing Canoe and Prideaux Islands to reach the channel between Jarvis and Jacques Islands. The entrance to the channel was a bay-like body of water with many small islands. We found the channel but being low tide, there was not enough water to pass through. We carried the kayaks, although if we had waited until after our lunch, we could have paddled through.

A fog rolled in one evening and the next morning it was raining lightly. With sunny weather, one tends to forget that this part of Vancouver Island is a rain forest. Rick and myself, the rain notwithstanding, decided to go to Willis Island on the western edge of the Broken Group. After lunch on the island, a family came in that had paddled from the road head in Toquart Bay, about 8 miles away. We paddled around the island, skirting Loudoun Channel, through open water that had only a minimal swell.

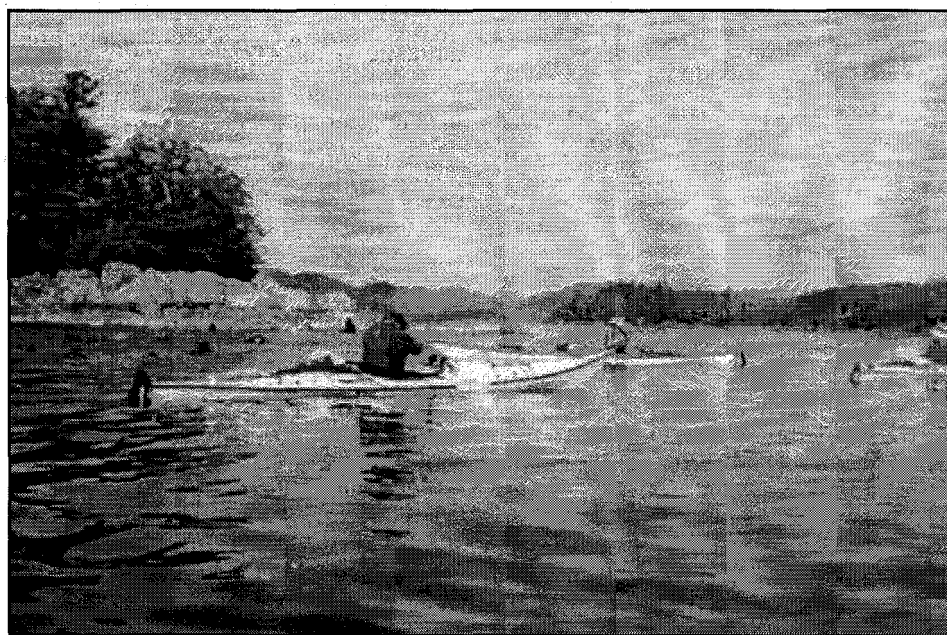
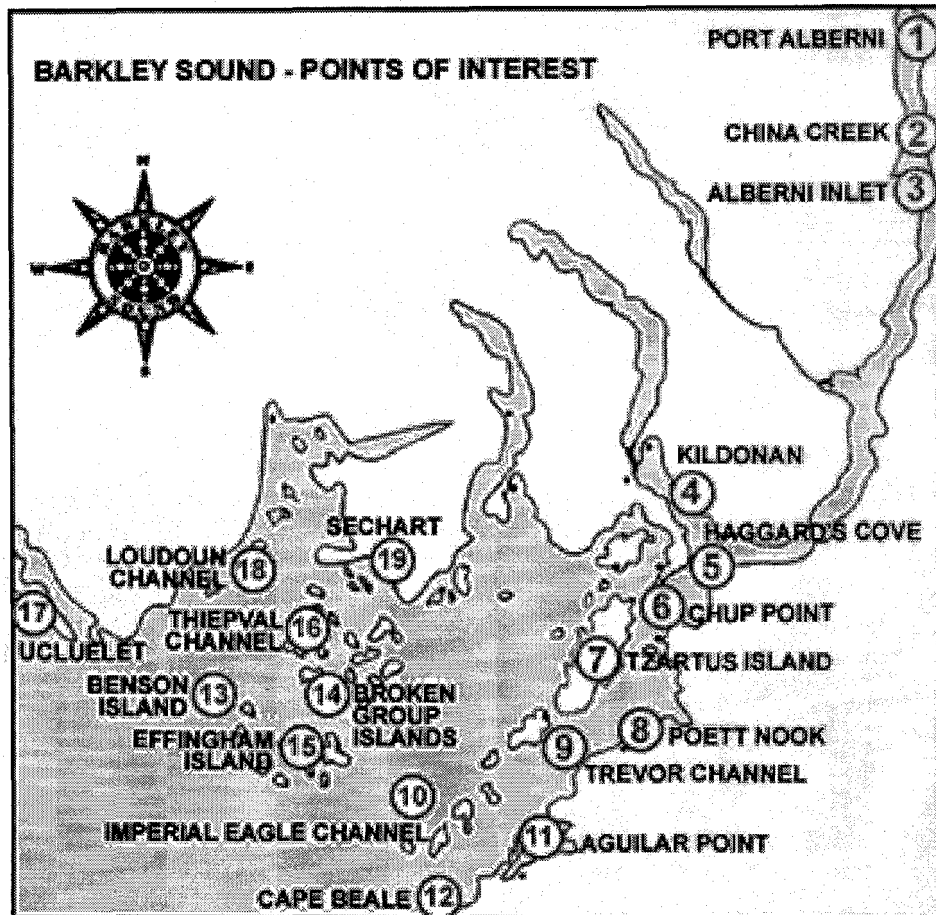
Every day provided a new experience in these glorious waters. While one can camp on several of the islands, making use of the camping facilities of the Pacific Rim National Park, the lodge is a nice alternative---hot showers, cooked meals as well as wine and beer.

It was with a touch of sadness that I boarded the ferry for the return to Port Alberni, but thankful to have had this wonderful experience of kayaking in such a remarkable area.

Perhaps one should be careful not to sing its praises for fear that it might become overcrowded.

*(Please don't spread the word!)*

Additional information on the ferry and lodge, can be found on the web ([www.ladyrosemarine.com](http://www.ladyrosemarine.com)).



Watching sea lions at Battley Island.