

COMOX VALLEY CANOE & KAYAK CLUB

Summer of 2007 trip report

Surprisingly, we were the first to arrive that morning at Alder Bay (near Pt. McNeil, Northern Vancouver Island). The arranged time was 9:15 with a departure at 11:00. Chris, the adventure leader, arrived with the two six-man outrigger canoes in tow. Now the task was to unload the heavy outriggers. Amas and iacos untied from the racks were laid out on the grass ready for rigging. The destination, the Broughton Archipelago paddlers' Inn on Gilford Island, was possibly seven hours of continuous paddling through uninhabited islands. This of course, depended on the ebbing tides and if the winds were gentle. We stowed our equipment, then paused to watch the Slopes in this leg of the Van Isle 360 Race ghosting through the channel. A pod of Orca surfaced and breached as if they were following.

Right at the onset we confronted the pull of the tidal currents leading us into swirling eddies and standing waves. The canoes stayed relatively close together 'minding' one another's safe crossing. We regrouped behind the cluster of Pearse islets, then forged toward the northern tip of Hanson Is. Our next quest was to strike out right across Blackfish Sound which totally exposed us to open water or to extend our paddle by hours, taking a crescent shaped route which safely snugs the shores of Hanson and Harbledown Isles. I scanned the horizon searching for any sail boat. Quite far off, I spotted a sailboat that had passed earlier in channel. No sails were up. I was sure there were no winds coming. "Let's try straight across!" Our crossing was smooth and energized. In the later section we encountered the stronger currents, which just helped us to Swanson Island. Our epic wasn't half way yet. An abandoned burnt-out homestead offered peaceful refuge; a place to stretch, explore and discuss our next tactic, Knight Inlet. Compasses, GPS and maps were constantly being studied.

The vast kelp forests danced with the currents. Shallow waters exposed kaleidoscopes of lush colourful sea weeds. We paddled onward heading into Retreat Passage with one more section of possible crosswinds. For us, all was flat. The Magnetic Disturbance near Meade Bay provided discussion and debate with our "navigators". One more nutrition stop was in order. The paddle had been so long now that we were completely exhausted. Next stop the Buffer Zone. All we could think about was that Josee and Bruce would have a dinner waiting for us and our journey was over. We had to get there before 8 pm. We were hoping that the turquoise cabin was at the end of each inlet. Finally it appeared below the bluffs, a floating turquoise gem. The crews picked up energy, like horses that had just seen the barn~ we were beat but rallied all our energy to arrive at our destination!

Bruce and Josee were on the dock to greet us. Josee with the most welcoming smile told us that dinner would be on the table in $\frac{3}{4}$ hr. enough time for us to unpack our gear and "happy hour". What a meal! We had prearranged to have our food catered. Fourteen of us sat at the huge table, hungry as loggers. Heaping bowls and platters with choices of fruits, vegetables, breads, sauces and desserts were set before us. We were amazed at the selection! Because the Paddlers' Inn is out in these relatively uninhabited islands we were treated to Canadian Hospitality at its' BEST clean, fresh, wholesome, organic, nutritious and simple.

. What a haven! Little buildings quaintly arranged along the wharf with a ramp leading up to the main lodge perched on a protected outcropping. There were many positions for launching and

exiting from the canoes with moorage and storage space for all our watercraft, including our friends' kayaks.

The docks provided a wonderful observation platform. A natural aquarium existed below our feet with sea anemones and sea worms attached to some decaying boom logs. The fish and other marine life darted about attending to their business. Curious otters frolicked along the shore, peering between the buildings, checking out the invaders. Rough hewed lumber in varying degrees of age, gave a sense of relaxation. Nature was in control, giving and taking back. There was nothing brash and artificial here. Simplicity and recycling are the survival code.

Our group consisted of a few marine biologists. Exploring with these knowledgeable characters enriched everyone's experience. Rooms and cabins were each an individual creation. Our self contained cabin set above a seclude cove boasted a huge airtight wood stove ready to roast any wet sailor, with a ceiling hung dryer for his and her clothes to boot! The linen had a light scent that brought-on a feeling of tranquility.

The kitchen, Josee's domain was the hub of activity. Open for any of us to sit and chat as she organized her family with the duties. I was delighted with her beautiful French accent. She prepared varieties of non-meat dishes. Josee placed such delicious meals that even the most finicky was pleased. We were overwhelmed with the selection and quantity of wonderful dishes. Her homemade granola was almost fought over. The coffee was set out for the earliest of risers. Popular brews and blends arranged beside the choice of sweeteners and creams. A smorgasbord of sandwich fillings, cakes, fruits, cookies, nuts and sprouts were set out for us to self pack lunches for the day's explorations.

Bruce entertained us with folklore and history of the area. Both are well versed in the ecological and environmental issues, living lightly on the land and sea. Bruce also offered suggestions for day paddling or hiking trips. Local artists, authors and history buffs were personally introduced. As our group lounged about on the docks, Bruce and Josee would appear with appetizers and fruit.

A massage table was rolled out on the deck and those with tense muscles or stress were treated to a complimentary massage. The sauna was perfectly arranged so one could cool off with a quick cooling dip off the dock into the ocean.

In the dark early morning of our departure the kitchen was ablaze with lights. Josee had a grand banquet breakfast waiting and all the fixings for our lunches were ready for us. We had a long return paddle ahead and needed "hardy" food to sustain our energy.

Bruce and Josee from the dockside gave hugs and waved us "safe journey" as we disappeared in the calm dark morning.

Mary Jane: "the food was awesome. Especially the granola!"

Terri:, "Great hosts! Friendly and knowledgeable. Bruce entertained us with readings from his poetry in the evenings, on the dock .It was wonderful."

Allan: "Obviously, not everyone would want to paddle this far in one day. But we did and I'd love to do it again, tomorrow!"