

Kayaking the Broughton Archipelago

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By Matthew Bowes

Sprawled out on Bill Proctor's dock amidst a mess of charts in the afternoon sun, I am absorbed in a scene framed by the image of the freshly painted "Ocean Dawn," a beautiful classic troller built for open waters by second generation Vancouver shipwright Morris Gronlund. The boat is set against a backdrop of glassy water and homes perched along the densely treed, steep, rocky shoreline of Proctor's Bay.

I have known Bill casually for about eight years since I began bringing my kayaking groups into Echo Bay as a guide on commercial sea kayaking trips in the Broughton Archipelago and Johnstone Strait. A visit to Billy's Museum situated on the Proctor homestead is always a highlight of these trips. Lining the floor and shelves are artifacts, or what he calls "junk," collected during a lifetime of logging, fishing and beachcombing. The scene always reminds me of Martin Alderdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* description of the shops on Cordova Street in Vancouver in the early 20th century: You come to shops that show faller's axes, swamper's axes—single bitted, double bitted; screw jacks and pump jacks, wedges, sledge hammers, and great seven foot saws with enormous shark teeth...

Antique bottles are lined up on the shelves in translucent rows, and glass topped wooden boxes house large displays of ancient projectile points, awls and hammer stones. The trolling spoons on the wall hang in testament to the commercial fishing history on the coast. An adjacent building sells local art, crafts and literature. I like dropping by the Proctors' because it offers a glimpse into rural coastal life and its history, and Bill is always happy to talk or "bulls...t" with my groups about his home—"the area from Drury Inlet to Johnstone Strait ... called the Broughton Archipelago by government agencies, but the residents of the area simply call it the Mainland" as described by Bill and Echo Bay writer Alex Morton in Bill's life story, *Heart of the Raincoast*. Moreover, they contend "[t]here are very few family homesteads left on this coast and here is unique, with three generations living on it until 1997..."

A visit to Echo Bay is always complemented by a stopover on Village Island further south in the Archipelago at the beginning of our kayaking trips: the site of a large abandoned native village which is documented vividly in J.P Spradely's *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid*, a Kwakiutl Indian. These places bookend our journeys through the islands, inlets and open sea between. These visits also provide experiences from which a cultural landscape is formed in people's imaginations to enrich and frame their paddling experience with a heightened sense of place to carry away with them.

On a typical trip during the summer, after a week spent camping on secluded shell midden beaches and weaving through a dizzying maze of islands, we paddle slowly into Echo Bay's small, protected harbor. A faded pictograph on the steep south-facing cliff at the entrance beckons, and the Windsong Sea Village with its funky disarray of brightly painted float houses comes into view on the north side of the bay. These houses display a decidedly Caribbean-like disposition in contrast to the characteristic diffused light of the west coast, which Echo Bay artist and writer Yvonne Maximchuk of Sea Rose Studios described to me once as "mother of pearl

white.” On the south side of the Bay sits the Echo Bay Store and Resort. (Editor's Note: Echo Bay Resort has been purchased by Pierre and Tove Landry and is now operating as Pierre's at Echo Bay.)

We land on the white midden beach at the head of Echo Bay, and set up camp high on the meadow above the rim of black soil and shell bank built up during thousands of years of human settlement. Other times we paddle one bay further to Bruce and Josee McMorran's Paddler's Inn (www.paddlersinn.ca), a rustic and cozy wilderness kayaking lodge with worldclass views and paddling at its doorstep. Its heart is the main float house with warm, lantern lit rooms, hot showers and inviting atmosphere. In a past life this building was a church, and stained glass windows still glow reverently as if in religious testament to the surrounding glory and splendor of islands, ocean, trees and mountains. Its pulpit is a large, hostel style kitchen where hungry paddlers preach the gospel of kayaking over self-prepared meals. If you choose the catered option, Josee's cooking can be described as no less than fresh, heavenly and organic.

Inevitably, wherever I end up staying, I eventually wander off to the Proctor homestead by walking past the community hall in Echo Bay, nestled in the meadow beside Echo Bay Marine Park, past the Echo Bay School and across the tidal flats. Much of Bill's personal history, environmental values, and political views are well known, as he has published them in *Heart of the Raincoast* and in an award winning history of the Broughton Archipelago *Full Moon Flood Tide*, co-written with Yvonne Maximchuk. Both books describe a passion, intimacy, depth of knowledge and deep connection to the land gained by exploration of its islands and deep inlets as a commercial fisherman, a logger and a trapper.

I once asked Bill to describe or define his sense of this place by inquiring, “do you have one sentence to describe the area or what the area means to you?” This question elicited a thoughtful pause and a good natured, hearty laugh. Bill shook his head and exclaimed a jovial, “I don't know. I have no idea,” that expressed the obvious difficulty in trying to describe something so complex. He declared, “Anybody comes and leaves here, I always tell them to enjoy our beautiful country.”

Matthew Bowes is a Gabriola Island based writer and photographer. Matt and partner Jen Smith own and operate Gabriola Sea Kayaking. www.kayaktoursbc.com