EDGE OF THE GREAT BEAR

Kayaking BC's Outer Coast from Banks Island to Cape Caution:

A Field Guide by Lewis, Emond and Dawkins

Introduction

Twenty years have passed since John Kimantas undertook the Wild Coast project to survey the coast of British Columbia, record landing and camping sites, and publish the results in three volumes.

Think about this for a minute

Our coast measures between 27,000 and 29,000 kilometres of mostly rugged shoreline, almost all of it empty of human occupation. Prior to John's books, scant information existed for paddlers. There was no google satellite and, in some places, marine charts based upon dated information didn't always match the GPS coordinates. John's effort opened the world's

best sea kayaking area to countless paddlers. His research went on to form the basis of the Marine Trail database, and his map products have guided many a grateful adventurer.

Quite reasonably, given the size of the project and the remoteness of the area, John's guides omitted most of the outer central coast. A few years after the last of the Wild Coast volumes appeared, some folks from Nanaimo decided to fill in that gap. Starting in 2011, the west coast of Banks Island was surveyed. Then following in 2012 and 2013, the west coasts of Aristazabal, Price, Calvert islands, and about 10 nautical miles (nm) proximate to Cape Caution. The results of these surveys were published online in three guides and made available on the self-publishing site issuu.com. The guides did not overlap the wild coast volumes for several reasons, including the fact that John advertised their existence and for several years hosted them on his website.

But time moves on. Issuu.com changed their policy first to deny downloading and recently to remove the guides entirely from their site. John's books are no longer easily available to purchase.

Many more years of experience have been added to the territory. If the information we found is to be kept available, suffice it to say that I am much closer to the end of my paddling career than the beginning. The time has come to update and refurbish those original kayaking guides.

What follows strives to be more of a field guide and less the results of a field survey. We have added many more paddling notes and included less geography. The three original guides have been compressed into one narrative. The territorial scope has widened in places to include territory that John Kimantas covered. The new guide adds information gleaned from 15 more years of central coast paddling.

During the Banks Island survey a hot political issue was a proposal to build an oil terminal at Kitimat. That went away, maybe, and development of new relations with the First Nations means the whole territory is probably in much safer hands. Another goal of the surveys was to have people in kayaks in the territory learn about it and, if need be, advocate for it. I think that has happened.

When John conducted his research and wrote his guides the outer islands south of Prince Rupert had a fearsome reputation for being inhospitable, devoid of decent campsites and prone to long stretches of difficult sea states. He cites these views as reasons to not paddle in these areas excepting those with exceptional paddling skills. The water classification systems for British Columbia categorize all the areas we surveyed as class four. That includes exposed rugged coast, strong turbulent currents, large swells and very difficult landings.

It turns out the outer coast is generally quite rugged, but the rest is possible. In the end all there was to fear was fear itself. With some basic skills in predicting sea state, good planning, a prudent risk-avoiding approach and patience, the risks are all within the abilities of those with ordinary paddling techniques.

Who should paddle in the area covered by this field guide?

Paddling out is optional, paddling home is not

Those with little interest in risk assessment, risk avoidance and risk management probably should paddle in places where someone will come help them when their situation goes awry. This is not that place. While the risks of the guide area are not generally more than many other places on the west coast, it is remote. If a problem arises the solution will be to get to shore safely and call for help which might take a while to arrive. Often there will not be a power craft in the area to help out, and the coast guard resources are limited and spread over a very large area.

For those with risk assessment experience, and making choices based on that assessment, it is prudent to act in a more risk adverse manner because of the isolation. Dial back your comfort zone (those sea states and conditions where a paddler feels confident in their ability to avoid unwanted events). Be more rigorous with keeping yourself out of precarious situations.

For those wanting to avoid risk that exceeds their comfort zone, and willing to spend some time in preparation and follow that up with a prudent and patient approach, ordinary ocean hard paddling skills are sufficient.

The guide area falls into the classification (like most of the coast) where paddling is not necessarily dangerous, but it is not a place for dangerous paddlers.

The guide is structured around camping beaches, but the goal is to provide enough information to enable paddlers to get from one place to the next within their comfort zone. This involves not only the ability to determine the timing of likely wind speed and direction but also the skill and disposition to add in the effects of ocean currents, and topography to predict sea state. This is called seamanship and it brings together the sky, the land and the sea.

For those not wanting to make the effort to keep safe in this way, this is probably not the place for you. In my view, no amount of hard paddling skills will keep paddlers safe if they ignore the soft skills and risk avoidance.

A final thought. The risk of injury on shore is many times more likely than while paddling. If a person incapacitates themselves by falling or otherwise being injured on the shore the

consequences could be dire. Stay with your group if you are in one. Be extra cautious if you are not.

Access and Communication

BC Ferries offers access to Bella Bella and Klemtu; the schedules are on their website.

The launch at Bella Bella is beside the terminal to the south. It has a good beach at the top with easy launching down to about half tides and reasonable launching below that.

In Klemtu, the launch at the ferry terminal is under the loading ramp. It is coarse rip-rap and not a very pleasant experience, but it is in a good place. Leave extra time to safely avoid injuring yourself in the launch process. This launch is most easily done on a flooding tide which also has the benefit of providing push from the terminal up to Split Head. Be careful about waves from boat wakes as the shape of the beach at the terminal seems to magnify their effect when they reach the shore.

The currents between the Klemtu terminal and Split Head are very strong along the more northerly section and paddling against that current might not be an option for most paddlers.

A humpback whale who had a calf a couple of years ago lives in the channel facing Boat Bluff. It has been there for about 15 years. Seeing it is a pleasant experience to start or end your trip.

It is possible to launch directly from Port Hardy. The BC Marine trail established a launch site at the boat ramp a few hundred metres from the ferry terminal.

For those paddling from Prince Rupert, it is possible to launch from the wharf near the ferry terminal. My preference, when coming off the ferry is to arrange for pick up of kayak and gear and get accommodation for the night. Then starting the next afternoon from Port Edward with a short paddle to Kitson Island.

I like to leave Kitson Island when there is a high tide at about 3 am. There is a reason behind this.

In my mind, the most interesting route to the north end of Banks Island goes via Edye Passage. By starting from Kitson very early in the morning the ebb tide and effect of the river will provide substantial push to the southwest and it is not difficult to get to the northwest corner of Porcher Island. From there another early start, launching near to high tide with help from a morning ebb will get a person to Goschen fairly easily. Then the same routine the next day will achieve Banks Island either along the north shore or at the first campsite going south

on the west side. If you paddle this way, take into account the ebb tide running out of Beaver Passage which will provide push from east to west, whether you want it or not.

The effect of this timing means a trip down the outside of Banks with high tides in the morning and the benefit of good ebbs. The advantage of being with the current on the outside of Banks means travelling at roughly twice the speed over ground. This is an important factor when making your daily assessment of likely sea state. Landing along Banks later in the morning at lower tides can be more challenging but I find it much easier to deal with a long beach when arriving rather when launching. If you are lazy like I am, take a long piece of rope and let the tide bring the boat in. There is a caveat to planning for ebbs in the morning on the west side of Banks Island. With south wind or wind waves, the effect of current against waves will result in a very difficult sea state.

Cell service is available near to Bella Bella, Klemtu, Hartley Bay and Kitkatla but not otherwise. VHF radios work well in most of the guide area but service can be spotty on the west side of Banks with access to the repeater on Haida Gwaii. Even if a person has trouble receiving radio transmissions, coast guard radio should be able to hear a call for assistance. In recent years satellite communicators have become more common and they will work to call for help or otherwise access the outside world. The best way to get help is probably to call the Rescue Coordination Centre.

PRINCE RUPERT, KLEMTU & BELLA BELLA LAUNCHES

Geology and geography

The route along the outer coast from the northern tip of Banks Island to Burnett Bay south of Cape Caution stretches approximately 200 NM. This guide focuses mainly on the area north of the south end of Price Island and south of the north end of Calvert Island. Queens sound is well looked after by other sources.

Throughout this area there are two dominant factors which are central to the kayaking experience. The first is low elevation along the outer coast. The second is the existence of Haida Gwaii.

The area north of Seaforth Channel along the outer coast forms part of a geological formation called the Milbanke Strandflat. It encompasses the west side of Banks Island, most of the Estevan Group, the west side of Aristazabal, the west side of Price Island and extends further south to the Bardswell Group and Queens sound.

Major shaping forces were marine and glacial erosions. There are no high walled inlets; the low elevation mountains are along the east side of the major islands and the glacial erosion has left thin soils with vegetation not suitable for commercial logging. The place looks like it would have before European contact. West of the main islands the flat terrain continues. Between Day Point on the south end of Price Island and Deadman Point on the north end of Banks Island there are more than 1000 islands or islets within a few miles of shore and many more rocks and reefs.

Islands and islets have a lee side as do rocks and reefs. As the guide goes through the terrain it will become clear that this makes for many areas that have little exposure to open ocean. Further South along Calvert and around Cape Caution the land remains flat near the shore but there are fewer protected places.

In the northern section, the other major influence is Haida Gwaii separated by the relatively shallow Hecate Strait from the mainland islands. Hecate Strait is 100 NM wide at the south end and about 30 NM wide at the north end. When water is pushed through a funnel like this (tides flood up the coast), it stacks up and speeds up.

An illustrative example of this effect is the difference between tide levels at the east and west ends of Skidegate Channel that separates the two larger islands of Haida Gwaii. A 3.5 metre tide at the west side will mean an almost 7 metre tide on the east side. The effect on the outer coast of mainland BC is similar with tide ranges in the 7 metres range from Prince Rupert south diminishing to 4 metres or so south of Queens Sound. Large tide changes mean stronger tidal currents and more challenges finding good spots to land and launch.

Haida Gwaii also stops the offshore swell. Moving South along the outer islands north of Banks Island, the offshore swell diminishes and disappears once clear of the north shore of Banks. It appears again around Clifford Bay on Aristazabal Island but the protective effect of the offshore islands and reefs and inshore protection means that both Aristazabal and Price islands are free from offshore swell except for a few short sections. No open surf beaches exist in this part of the guide area. This is not to say that sea states are necessarily calm in Hecate Strait. The area is shallow and wind waves not only cause difficult paddling conditions but they seem to persist after the wind calms. Some examples of this will be part of the detailed territorial narrative. Shallow water and strong currents around Cape Caution creates its own set of issues.

Tides and Currents.

Two names for the same phenomenon. Tidal flows move up the coast from the SW and ebb back down more or less the same way. Maximum current values for places like Otter passage, south of Banks Island and Beaver passage just to the north of it, suggest flow strength in both directions is similar.

This guide deals with the outer coast and that makes matters fairly straight forward. Current strength and water levels will increase as one moves north but the timing of these events will tend to follow the predictability of the open ocean. The guide deals with local effects and values for the outer coast on a district by district basis.

Circumstances change once away from the open water of Queen Charlotte Sound and Hecate Strait. And the further one gets from open water the more current directions and timing vary from a linear model. The convoluted nature of our coastal inlets means that, while all the water pushes north and then back south, the routes that it follows and the timing of that movement are anything but obvious.

For inland channels, DFO provides current information as part of sailing directions. Local influences are more common than a general picture. Our good fortune is to be on the outside and that means when the tide is coming in the current floods north and when it is going out it goes south. Further south, the deep inlets affect the timing but the regularity of the pattern remains.

South of Aristazabal Island tidal currents are less influential than further north, except around Cape Caution. As one moves north, current rates of 1-2 knots will have a large impact on progress and time estimates.

After a few days, I forget about tide heights. They are regular and are either a bit higher or a bit lower than the day before. Timing is more important.

Be aware that weather can have a significant effect on tide heights. When we were doing the Banks survey, we were camped on Kirkendale Island at the entrance to Kingkown Inlet; a very protected site, and we needed it as a strong low pressure with strong southerly winds was arriving in the night. We had camped in this place the previous night so we knew what the high tide level should be. As the storm passed over us, through the combination of low pressure and near gales pushing water into the inlet, it raised the high tide by over 30 centimetres above what we expected. If not anticipated, this can be an unhappy situation when camped on the beach. More on this point appears in the section on Banks Island.

Weather

When sitting about camp listening to the weather report in the evening, we tend to think in terms of wind and maybe rain and visibility. But, while important, it is not really what we need to know. The question should be “what the sea state will be where we are paddling? and how will it likely change or develop as the day goes along?”

If you paddle west out of Hakai Pass going south on a nice clear day with little wind but on a big ebb with incoming SW swell, within minutes of clearing the Surf Islands you will desperately wish you were somewhere else. If it is windy, it will become worse. You will be in very rough water where swell meets current and you will likely not be able to retreat. There will be a few other examples of this sort of situation throughout the guide.

While we tend to focus on poorer weather, keep in mind that most of the time in July and August the weather is fair. Afternoon northwesterlies are far more common than low pressure systems. Predicting sea state is more complicated than just timing the wind but it is not hard to get it close to right most of the time. What is required is: the basket of skills called seamanship.

Fortunately, the factors, other than wind and visibility that go into sea state can be sorted out in advance with good preparation. Currents, the likely effects of land form, and depth are all easily determined before leaving home. It is hard to be perfect but not so hard to be right enough that dangerous or overly stressful situations can be avoided.

In the field, the main chore is predicting the wind where you are at over the period of time before there is a safe, achievable place to get off the water. My experience is that the Environment Canada weather forecast is close to correct for at least 24 hours. As one moves further out the timing becomes less reliable and more than a few days in advance the energy predicted in systems might be off. While the forecast applies to weather reporting areas there are seldom times that the weather is uniform across the whole district.

The Hecate Strait district is about 140 nm from north to south and up to about 100 nm east to west at its widest. McInnes Island to Pine Island is 90 nm North to South and 50 or so nm east to west. The skill required is to predict the developing wind and visibility where you will be at when you want to be paddling; fortunately, it is not that hard.

Low pressure systems bring SE winds which generally move toward the east at about 20 knots. The forecast gives you strong clues about this if you are aware of where the various reporting stations and weather districts are located and how far away they are. There is a lot of information available to help. A row of buoys offshore, North, Middle and South Nomad will record anything coming from the west well before arrival. Another row, West Dixon, West

Moreseby, South Moresby and East Delwood are closer to landfall but still many hours away from the guide area. Further in are Central Dixon, North Hecate, South Hecate and West Sea Otter, which are mostly about 30 nm from shore; these buoys are updated each hour and at that time the information is close to real time.

There are also many land stations west of the guide area. Rose Spit, Cumshewa Inlet, Sandspit Airport, Bonilla Island, Cape St James and Sartine Island. These are also updated hourly and the updates are close to real time. There are also several manned lighthouse stations in the area which report only every three or four hours and so, are less helpful for timing the weather.

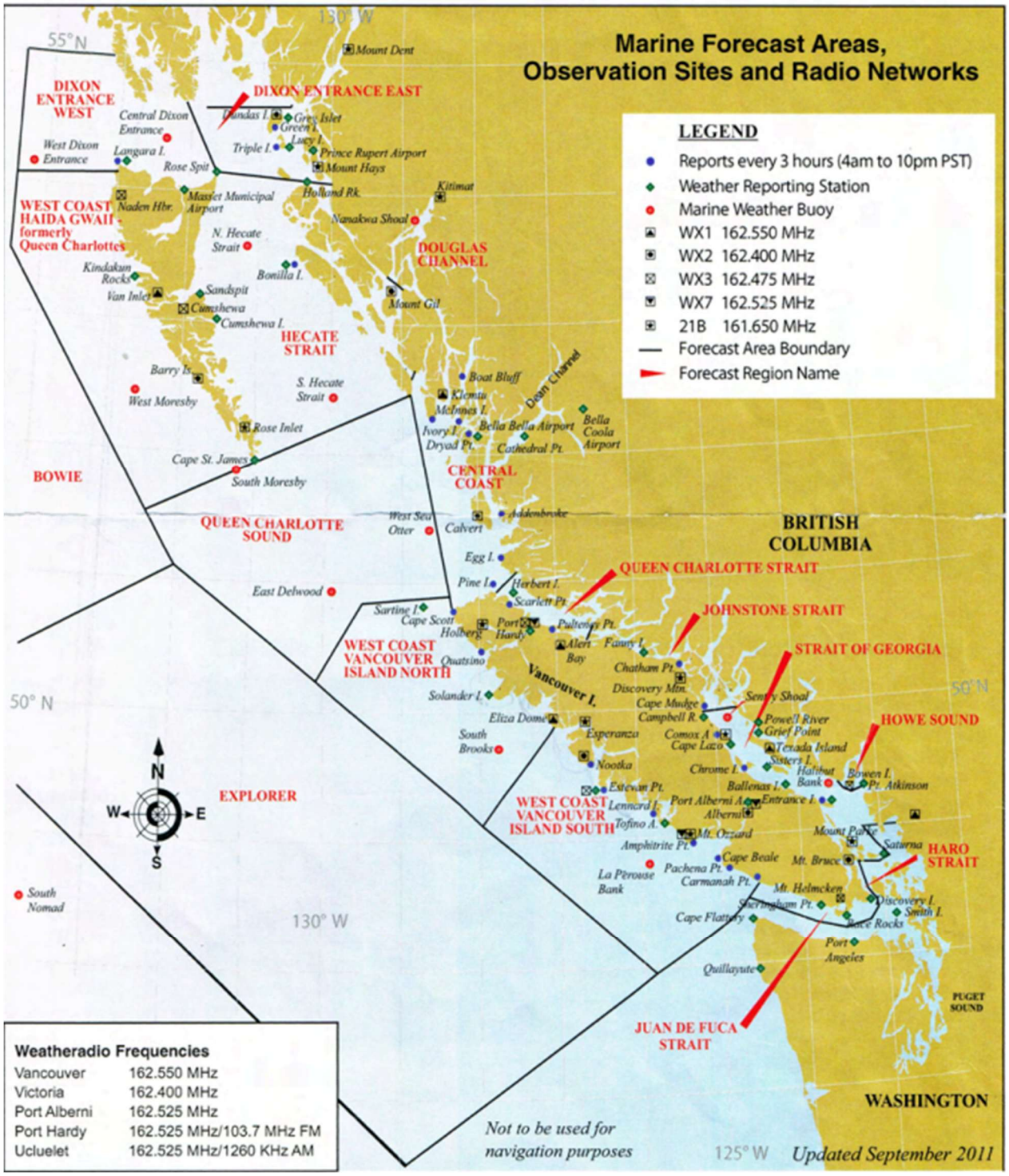
So, listening to the forecast and accepting that as what will happen where you are at is not very helpful. The wind values will likely happen somewhere in the district but not everywhere and not always at the same time. What works is to listen several times per day and figure out what is happening over the coast and then use the stations nearest you to determine what is developing where you are at.

An example could be if you were near the north end of Aristazabal Island and the forecast for Hecate Strait south was increasing SE wind rising during the morning. That wind would show up first on the mainland of Haida Gwaii and take 2 or 3 hours to move across Hecate Strait. When the wind started to rise at the South Hecate Buoy you would have about an hour or so before it would affect the coast. The north end of Aristazabal is north of the South Hecate Buoy and south of the North Hecate Buoy. So, balancing the two reported values will guide you toward a good estimate.

To make these sorts of timing predictions it is necessary to know where the various reporting stations are and approximately how far away they are from you. At first, to do this successfully, some pre-trip homework is required. If you use a GPS enter the locations of the various stations and your device will tell you how far away and in what direction they are. A chart showing the locations of the various reporting stations is appended.

Once you have sorted out how the wind is going to change during the day you can then apply that to the predicted tidal currents and topographical influences to predict sea state. Weather is a very dynamic system; picking safe windows is a fundamental skill for paddlers in the guide area.

The issue of afternoon northwesterly winds caused by land heating will be dealt with on a more local level. Paddlers will spend more days avoiding the worst of this effect than southerly winds associated with low pressure systems.


Marine Forecast Areas,
Observation Sites and Radio Networks
LEGEND
Reports every 3 hours (4am to 10pm PST)
Weather Reporting Station
Marine Weather Buoy
WX1 162.550 MHz
WX2 162.400 MHz
WX3 162.475 MHz
WX7 162.525 MHz
21B 161.650 MHz
Forecast Area Boundary
Forecast Region Name
DIXON ENTRANCE WEST
DIXON ENTRANCE EAST
WEST COAST HAIDA GWAII - formerly Queen Charlotte
DOUGLAS CHANNEL
HECATE STRAIT
BOWIE
CENTRAL COAST
QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND
BRITISH COLUMBIA
QUEEN CHARLOTTE STRAIT
JOHNSTONE STRAIT
STRAIT OF GEORGIA
HOWE SOUND
WEST COAST VANCOUVER ISLAND NORTH
WEST COAST VANCOUVER ISLAND SOUTH
EXPLORER
HARO STRAIT
JUAN DE FUCA STRAIT
PUGET SOUND
WASHINGTON
Vancouver I.
Mount Dent
Central Dixon Entrance
West Dixon Entrance
Langara I.
Rose Spit
Dundas I.
Greig Islet
Green I.
Lucy I.
Triple I.
Prince Rupert Airport
Mount Hays
Holland Rk.
Kitimat
Masset Municipal Airport
Naden Hbr.
Nanakwa Shoal
N. Hecate Strait
Kindakun Rocks
Bonilla I.
Sandspit
Van Inlet
Cumshewa
Cumshewa I.
Mount Gil
Barry Is.
West Moresby
S. Hecate Strait
Rose Inlet
Cape St. James
South Moresby
Boat Bluff
Klemtu
McInnes I.
Ivory I.
Dryad Pt.
Bella Bella Airport
Cathedral Pt.
Bella Coola Airport
Dean Channel
West Sea Otter
Calvert
Addenbrooke
Egg I.
Pine I.
Herbert I.
Scarlett Pt.
East Delwood
Sartine I.
Cape Scott
Port Hardy
Holberg
Quatsino
Pulteney Pt.
Alert Bay
Fanny I.
Chatham Pt.
Discovery Mtn.
Solander I.
Eliza Dome
South Brooks
Esperanza
Nootka
Cape Mudge
Campbell R.
Sentry Shoal
Powell River
Grief Point
Comox A
Cape Lazo
Texada Island
Sisters I.
Chrome I.
Halibut Bank
Ballenas I.
Bowen I.
Pt. Atkinson
Estevan Pt.
Lennard I.
Port Alberni A
Entrance I.
Alberni
Tofino A.
Mt. Ozzard
Amphitrite Pt.
Mount Parke
Saturna
Cape Beale
Mt. Bruce
Pachena Pt.
La Pérouse Bank
Carmanah Pt.
Mt. Helmcken
Sheringham Pt.
Discovery I.
Smith I.
Race Rocks
Cape Flattery
Port Angeles
Quillayute
South Nomad
50° N
55° N
130° W
125° W
Weatheradio Frequencies
Vancouver 162.550 MHz
Victoria 162.400 MHz
Port Alberni 162.525 MHz
Port Hardy 162.525 MHz/103.7 MHz FM
Ucluelet 162.525 MHz/1260 KHz AM
Not to be used for navigation purposes
Updated September 2011

Fauna

While post contact resource usage has had a substantial impact on the whole area, the trend is toward a more environmentally aware approach to human usage. In the area covered by this guide there is almost no human occupation. Nature can be resilient and throughout the area, creatures in the sky, on the land and in the sea are abundant.

Keep in mind that while we might find observing animals to be awe inspiring or breathtaking, they could not care less about what we think. The things that live here are going about their business in the way that they have done for a very long time and we should be careful not to interfere with their behaviors.

Birds

Throughout the area you can see the usual collection of sea birds, raptors and migratory species. For those visiting Wilby Point in Kitasoo Bay, they will likely meet a local raven who struts around like it owns the place…maybe it does.

In many areas in the summer, sandhill cranes are raising their young and preparing for the trip south. These large birds have a distinctive call. They can be found in areas where there are mud flats including the west sides of Aristazabal Island and Banks Island and around the north end of Price Island.

Often, they are not used to people so if you don't disturb them, they will tend to ignore you. The opportunity to observe and interact with various bird species on a daily basis exists throughout the area. Enjoy.

Marine Mammals

Humpback whales, orcas, seals, dolphins, porpoises, sea lions, river otters and sea otters are common throughout the area. I have usually seen orcas in Milbanke Sound and Seaforth Channel. The sea otters that apparently migrated from the west coast of Vancouver Island to Queen's Sound many years ago have spread themselves across the area. There may be rules about being close to whales. My observations are that they go about their business and it really doesn't matter much what you do in a kayak. Sometimes they will come close and sometimes not. I do think they are aware of a kayak's presence.

Several years ago, while paddling on a calm day near Langara Island I and the person beside me, noticed that the water was bulging under my boat. This effect, sometimes called a footprint, happens just before a large whale surfaces. Both my paddling partner and I knew what was happening, but the water subsided and the whale did not surface under my boat.

Terrestrial Mammals

The area has the usual assortment of coastal fur-bearing animals. By far the dominant species on the outer coast is wolves. They are everywhere. You will see them, when they want, on the beaches. They will come around at night to check you out. And sometimes they will just look at you. I have never had trouble with wolves being aggressive.

However, in the last two or three years the family of wolves on the west side of Campania Island has become aggressive, apparently seeking human food. The likely reason for this new behaviour is humans are feeding them either intentionally or inadvertently. Were these wolves near to people, the result would be their destruction. Campania Island is remote so nothing will likely be done. Be aware should you want to go to this place. And please don't create this problem in other locations.

In the northern section of the guide, I have only seen a black bear on two occasions. Both times on the west side of Price Island. Wolves are said to eat black bears so this may explain the rarity of sightings.

Brown bears, grizzlies, have been turning up in the area around Higgins Passage and Kitasoo Bay in recent years. Apparently young males leave the more inland locations to avoid large males. It may be that banning hunting of these creatures inland has resulted in more of them surviving and needing to expand their territory.

I am aware of one group who were confronted by a determined and persistent young brown bear at Monk Bay. They decided to go to a different campsite. In the area proximate to Cape Caution on the BC mainland, wolves, brown bears and black bears seem to somehow co-exist in larger numbers.

I have never seen a cougar or cougar tracks on the outer coast.

Mice and mink are everywhere.

Fish

I think of fish differently from other animals, mainly because I like to eat them and they form part of my meals up to half of the time.

Various types of bottom-living rockfish exist throughout the area. Lingcod are common. Midwater species like black rockfish, sometimes called sea bass, are also common. Ling cod and black rockfish are easiest to catch on points that are exposed to the open ocean. This often means a bumpy ride in the echo off of the rocks, but I find it worthwhile.

There are areas restricted from any fishing called rockfish conservation areas. This includes part of Calamity Bay, part of Kitasoo Bay, portions along the west side and Calvert island, the

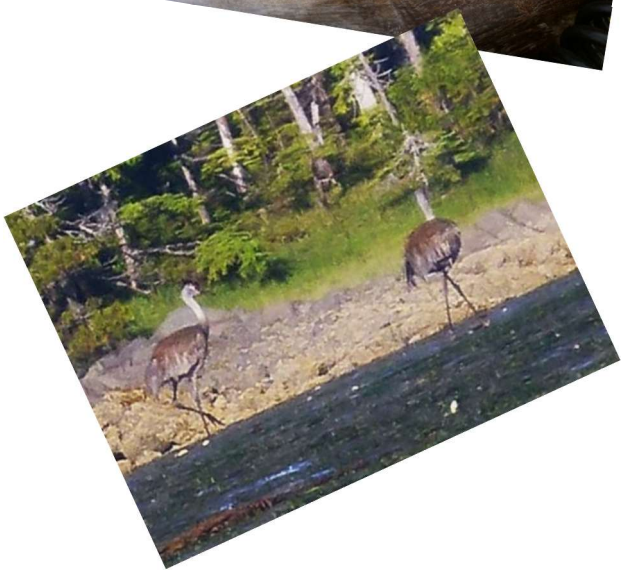
northern entrance to Smith Sound and other areas. Sort it out before you go where fishing is not allowed. The guide will point out some areas where I have had success catching dinner.

Coho salmon are often quite common in the summer. Beaches that include a sand ramp down to below low tide are often good places to spin cast at higher tides. Trolling or using buzz bombs is also effective.

The entire area is closed permanently to harvesting most bivalves. The risk is PSP poisoning. The closures are permanent not because the problem always exists but because no testing is done. If you decide to eat clams just be careful. Locals might have a small taste and wait to see if anything happens before eating these creatures. Remember you are isolated and getting PSP might have a poor outcome.

Any fishing requires a license and compliance with a lot of regulations. For those planning to fish, some preparation and research at home before setting out is a good idea.

Anecdotally, fishing is changing, particularly for species other than salmon. In recent years it just seems to take a bit longer to catch something. This may be related to the increase in surface water temperatures and the reaction of various species to this change. This is probably not a good thing.



First Nations

On Calvert Island, footprints made 13,200 years ago were once said to be the oldest in North America. Village sites on Triquet Island and Gander Island, consistent with origin stories of people still living in the central coast, date back 14,000 and 11,000 years old respectively. The historical story remains incomplete. What is clear is that people have been living in this area for a very long time and the First Nations people that live here today trace their lineage back to those early times. In this guide, area villages are located at Kitkatla, Hartley Bay, Klemtu, Bella Bella and Rivers Inlet. Those with time to stop and visit will likely benefit, if they so choose, from the experience.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, we can fairly assume that everywhere along the coast was occupied and that a long history of local relationships had resulted in a stable and sustainable culture. European contact changed that through the mechanism of new diseases and intentional policy of the newcomers. The effect was dramatic for the First Nations but they have persisted and remain determined to have some control over their traditional territories and maintain the valuable lessons from their cultural history.

Canadian governments accept that First Nations have the right to these aspirations. What is not resolved and may not be resolved any time soon, is the form and substance this new relationship will take. In the interim, we are all here, both the original peoples and those who have come from away, and none of us is going anywhere. And despite strong emotions, we are all people and more alike than different.

What is also clear is that regardless of the political arrangements, going forward, the place needs to be looked after to preserve its history, its present value and its future. In recent years collaboration between First Nations and governments works toward incorporating the knowledge of First Nations people into policies to preserve the environment for the benefit of those here now, and those who will be here in the future.

As this is being written an agreement to protect an area near Banks Island was announced. It will be a refuge for several species of marine life that are under threat. Climate change will require even more collaboration and wisdom going forward. Commercial and industrial development needs to respect local values and environmental risks.

Paddlers who use this guide need to be aware that every beach they stop on was, at an earlier time, the home of an ancestor of someone who lives in this area today. This does not need to mean not being in the area, but it does mean that evidence of historical usage must be left untouched. First nations people understand that we are all part of nature. This is neither good nor bad, but our behavioural choices can be both good and bad. Keep this in mind as

you visit. Take it upon yourself to be an advocate for preserving and keeping this wonderful place.

A thought about paddling on the outer coast

Paddlers choose challenging and remote areas for many reasons. Some want to test their planning and paddling skills. Some come for the scenery, the wildlife and the photos that they provide. Some come to share their experience with friends. Some come just to be in the area and absorb it. I have tried them all over the years, moving toward the later choice as time works its changes. I have learned what is most important is not your motivation but your attitude. I think the best guide to bringing an appropriate attitude can be learned from the First Nations. Understand that you are part of nature and respect all of it. Ensure that your passage is always sustainable. Take responsibility for stewardship both locally and more broadly with the environment.

ALWAYS A GREAT DAY ON THE COAST

Throughout this guide the name Kayak Bill is mentioned several times. We would be remiss to not provide some context as to this man's place on the coast and his effect on coastal history from the mid-'70's to current day.

Born in 1947, William Lawrence "Billy" Davidson came to the coast from Alberta around 1975. Fiercely independent and with a need to record his journeys through art he began traveling the coastline by kayak while living off the land and sea. During his trips he established 30-some wilderness camps, roughly a day's paddle apart stretching from the Broughtons as far north as Hecate Strait. When not at one of his camps he painted what he had seen and sold the art to bank roll his next excursion. He carefully documented his 28 years on the coast in journals and charts. If you travel on the Edge of the Great Bear route you will pass by or very close to ten of them. He became a coastal legend known as Kayak Bill

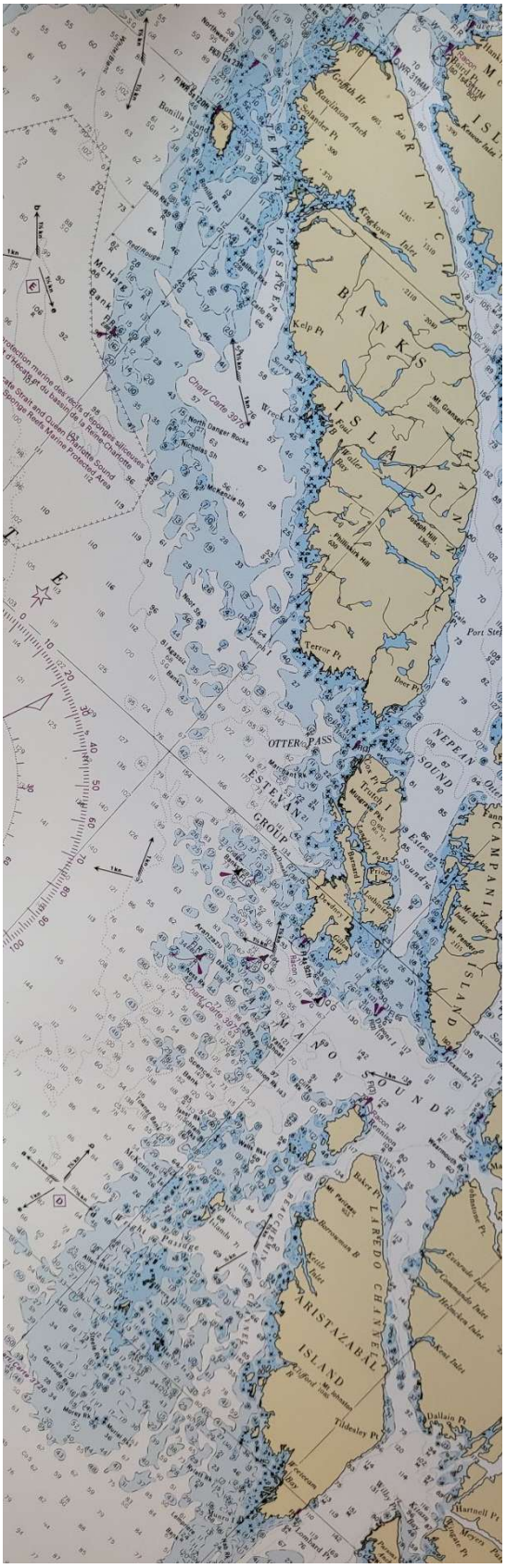
While he traveled a coast not known for fair weather and glassy waters he couldn't be described as a skilled technical paddler by today's standards. His time and equipment didn't favor or support technical body, boat, blade expertise so he kept himself safe through judgement, patience and an understanding of weather and seas. It is in that vein that we encourage you to undertake this route.

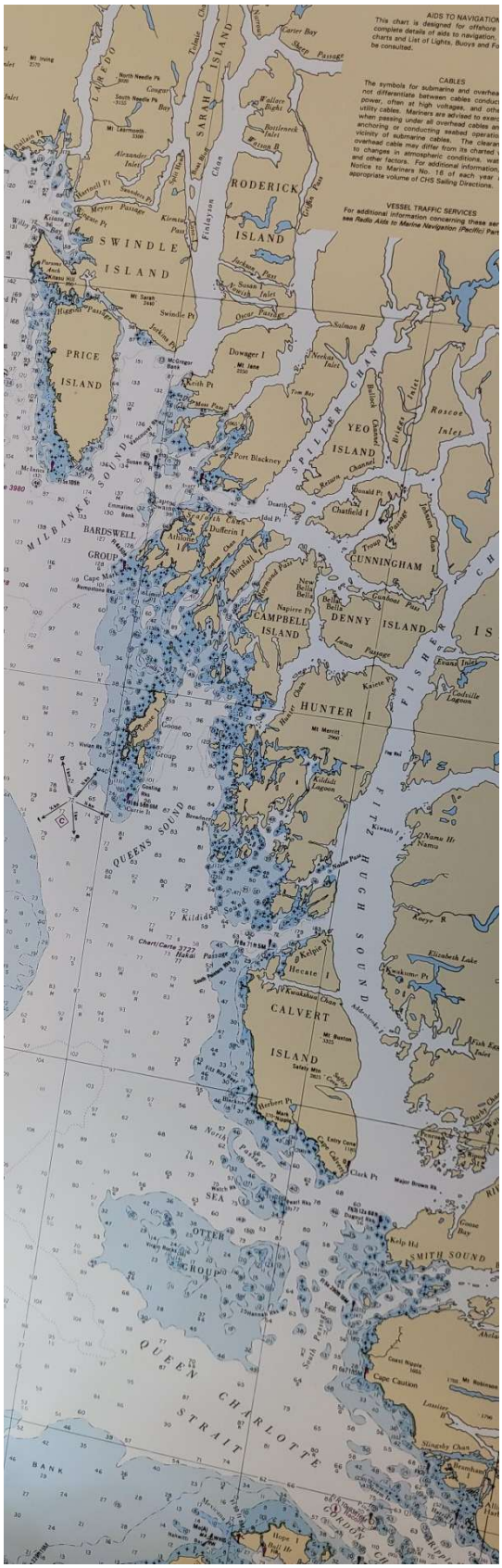
If you are interested in learning more about the life and times of Kayak Bill read Brandon Pullan's 2021 book titled "*To Be A Warrior ~ The Life and Mysterious Death of Billy Davidson*". The largest online collection of articles about Kayak Bill as well as photos and descriptions of his camps can be found at *3meterswell*.

Self Portrait

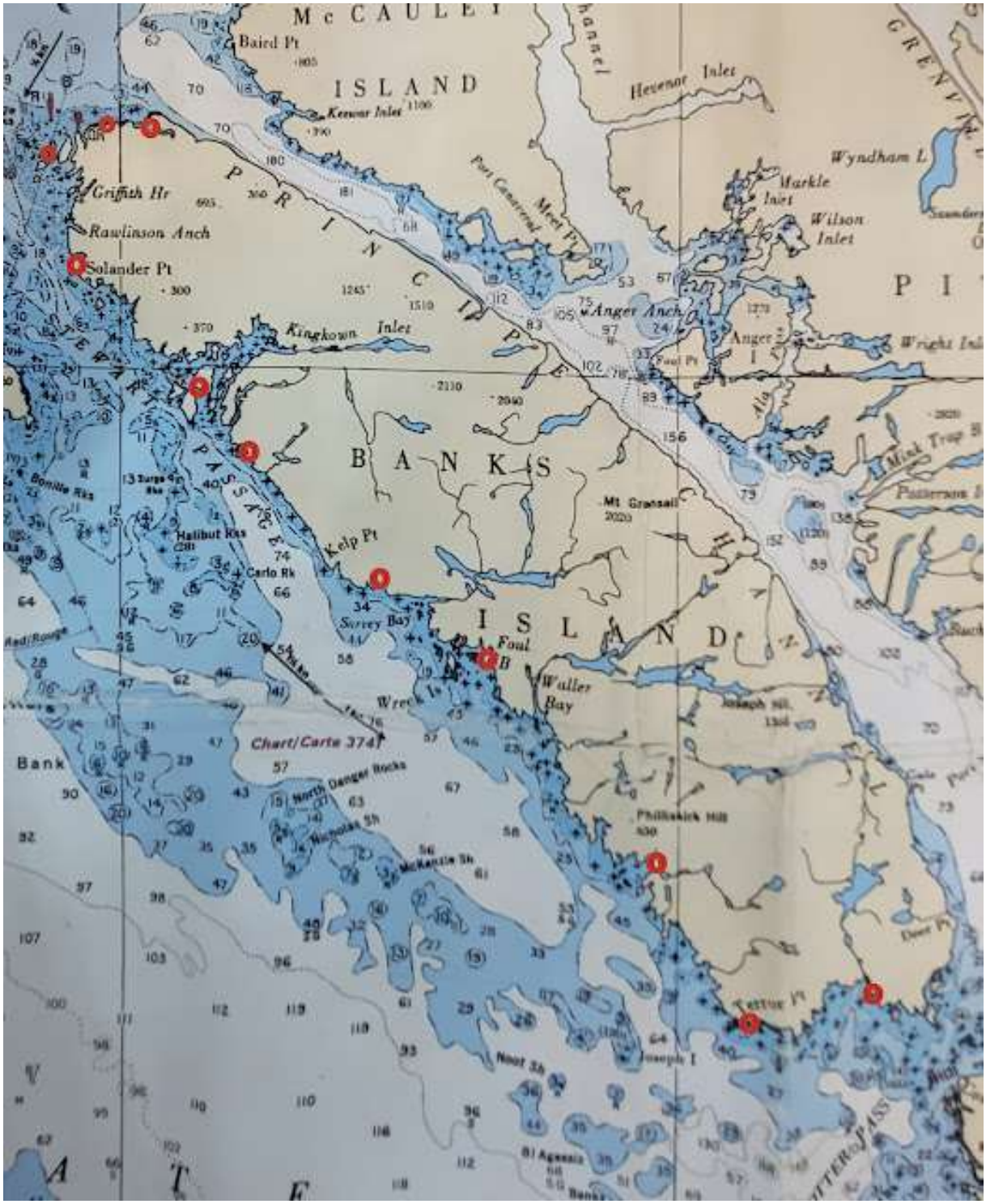
Date: 1981
Dimensions: ~9.5" x 7"
Notes: This is the earliest piece in the collection, the only one with a title, and one of only two known self portraits. It shows Kayak Bill in his large green and white kayak being grabbed by a wave.

AREA OF EXPLORATION





Banks Island



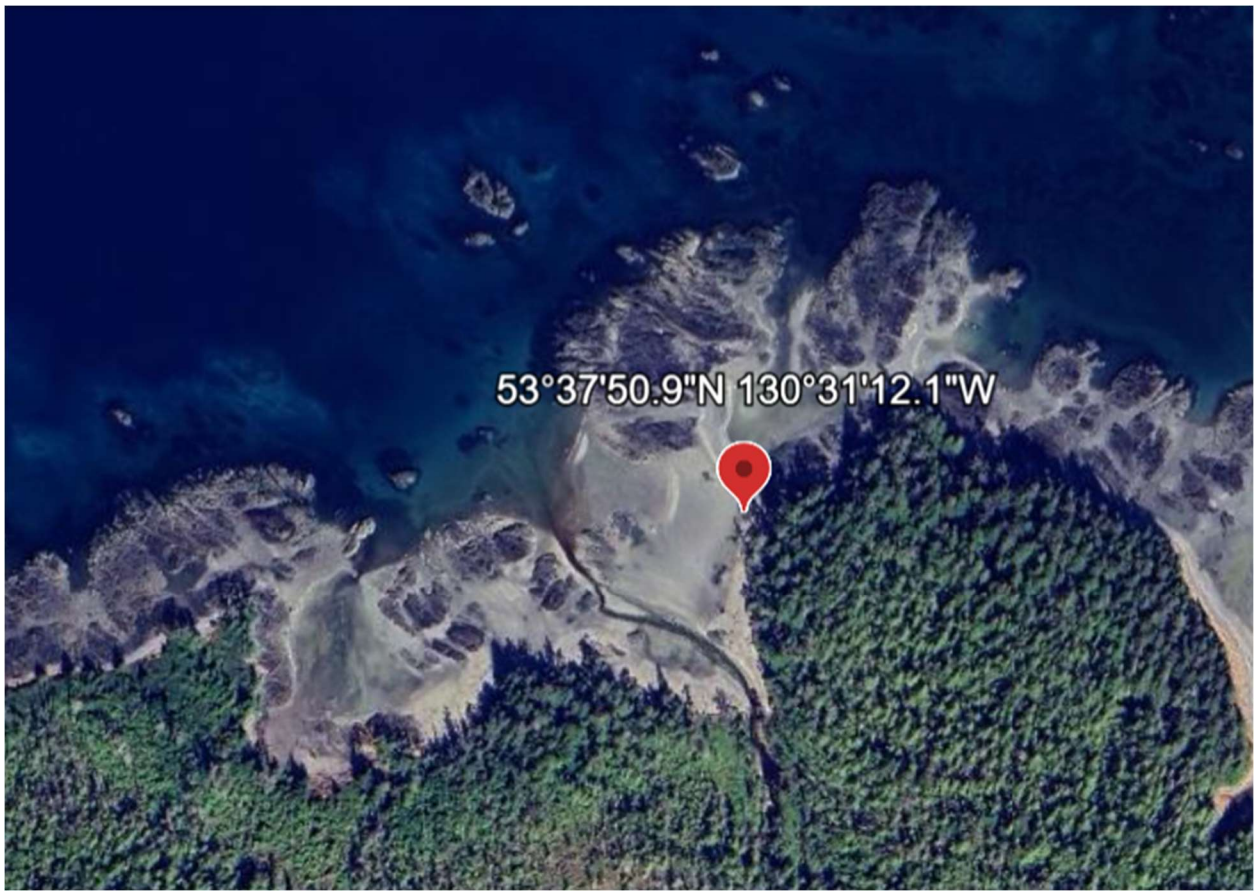
When arriving at the north shore of Banks Island coming from the north, paddlers will have noticed that the offshore swell has pretty much disappeared leaving only the waves generated in Hecate Strait. Local weather predictions should be adequate for predicting sea state. Be aware than on an ebb, a lot of water comes out of Beaver Passage north of McCauley Island, which will cause drift to the west. Beaver Passage has a maximum speed of 4 knots, and it is a secondary current station for the purposes of timing.

1. Deadman Inlet

The eastern half of the north shore of Banks Island has several beaches of fine sand, all of which are quite flat. This means a very long distance from camp to water when the tide is low. Plan accordingly. The best of them is the beach near the west entrance to Deadman Inlet. This site has a couple of small streams that drain the lowlands to the south.

2. Banks Island North

Approximately l.2 nm west of Deadman Inlet is a westerly-facing gravel beach with a strong stream. This beach is considerably steeper than the sand beaches to the east making coming and going easier. It is our choice for the north shore of Banks. Entry is possible from the north between the rock at higher tides. There is ample beach camping above summer high tides.



3. Larsen Island

The channel between Banks Island and Larsen Island is passable at tides above 4 metres at Griffith Harbour. There is little to choose between this channel and going around the west end of Larsen as both routes are well protected from offshore influence. The west-facing beach on the southwest shore of Larsen Island is a well protected choice with boulders lower down and sand at the top. Fortunately, a couple of canoe channels have been cleared which are visible on the google image. There is beach camping but no reliable water source.

Once south of Larsen Island strong influence from sea states and winds from the northwest diminish substantially.

The easiest way to transit the west side of Banks Island from north to south is to be there with high tides early in the morning and use the ebb. Padding against a flood will slow progress substantially. An important caveat to using the ebbs is that with southeast wind and waves paddling can become very difficult.

The effect of low-pressure systems with southerly winds in Hecate Strait

On my first visit to this area in 2011 we camped at the Kirkendale site, planning to take a day off for the passage of a low pressure system and rain. On our second night at this place the low passed and the wind blew from the south. The effect was that the high tide was one foot or thirty centimetres higher than it would have been with good weather. This site is not exposed directly to the south, so it was fully protected from the wind. The next time I was in this area, the day after a low pressure had passed, the energy in the water flowing north caused a very difficult disorganized sea state once I emerged from the protection of the Sneath Islands.

This was the effect of ebb meeting incoming energy on a day that had little wind. The shallow water was probably part of the issue but the lesson to be learned is that Hecate Strait takes a long time to settle down after southerly wind has created rough seas. I had experienced this phenomenon further south when returning to Aristazabal from the west after a strong low had passed. On that occasion no wind but 6 or 7 nm of very difficult paddling in heavy chop that seemed to lack structure.

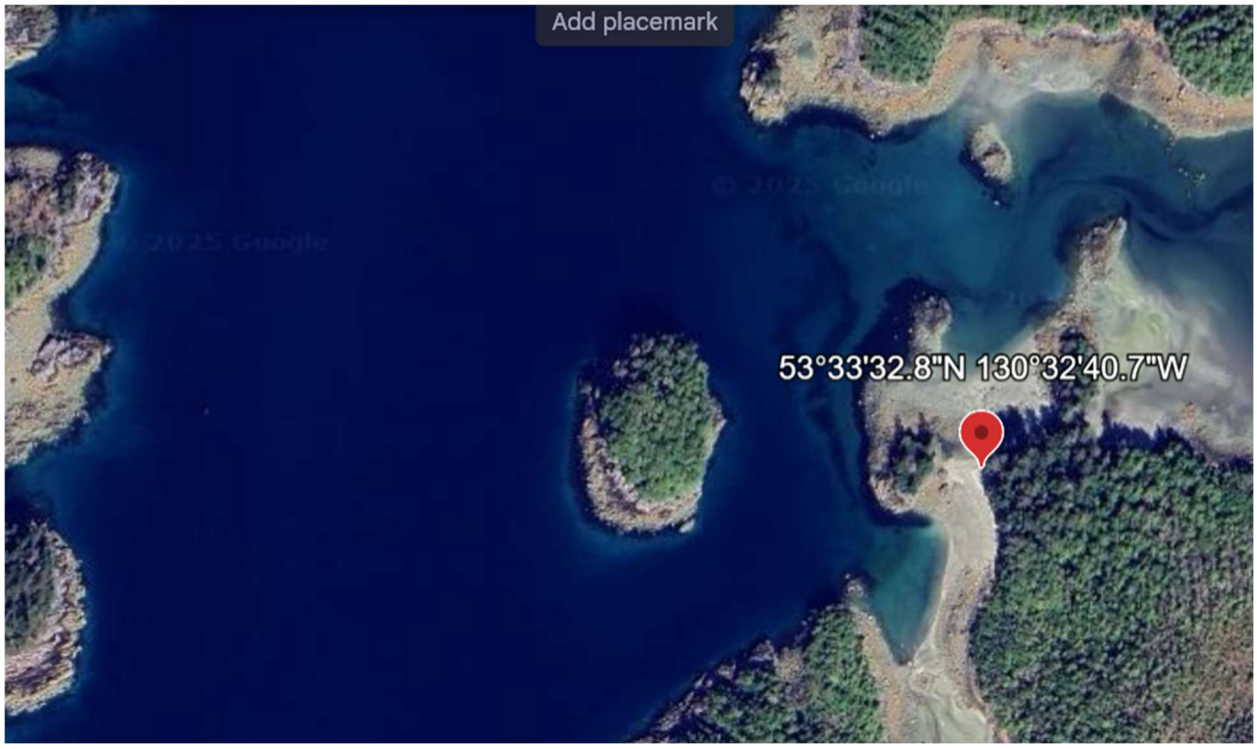
On the first trip we were stopped by this effect at the site south of Kingkown Inlet on a day after the wind had calmed and the low pressure had passed. I should have learned from that first experience when there years later.

The combination of higher tides caused by the combined effects of southerly winds, low pressure and presumably shallow water can have a significant effect on the utility of campsites. I have camped twice at the site east of Kelp Point in good weather and found good beach camping at quite high tides. Jon Dawkins was there during a low pressure with modest southerly winds and the beach flooded with a predicted high tide at Griffith Harbour one foot less than during our visit.

The moral is that the west side of Banks is quite an easy area to paddle in good weather making good time with the aid of ebbs in the morning. It can also be a very difficult place to paddle with poor weather and some of the camps will not be useful. It is probably prudent to have a few extra days to stay on shore if a low passes and be prepared to wait longer than usual for the sea to calm.

4. Tombolo

The campsite at the tombolo at the south entrance to an inlet about 1/2 nm north of Solander Point has good beach camping that should survive high tides and most weather conditions. I is a very pleasant and protected spot. This is probably where a person wants to stop with southerly weather imminent or having recently passed. There appears to be a good creek at the head of the inlet if you are short of water.



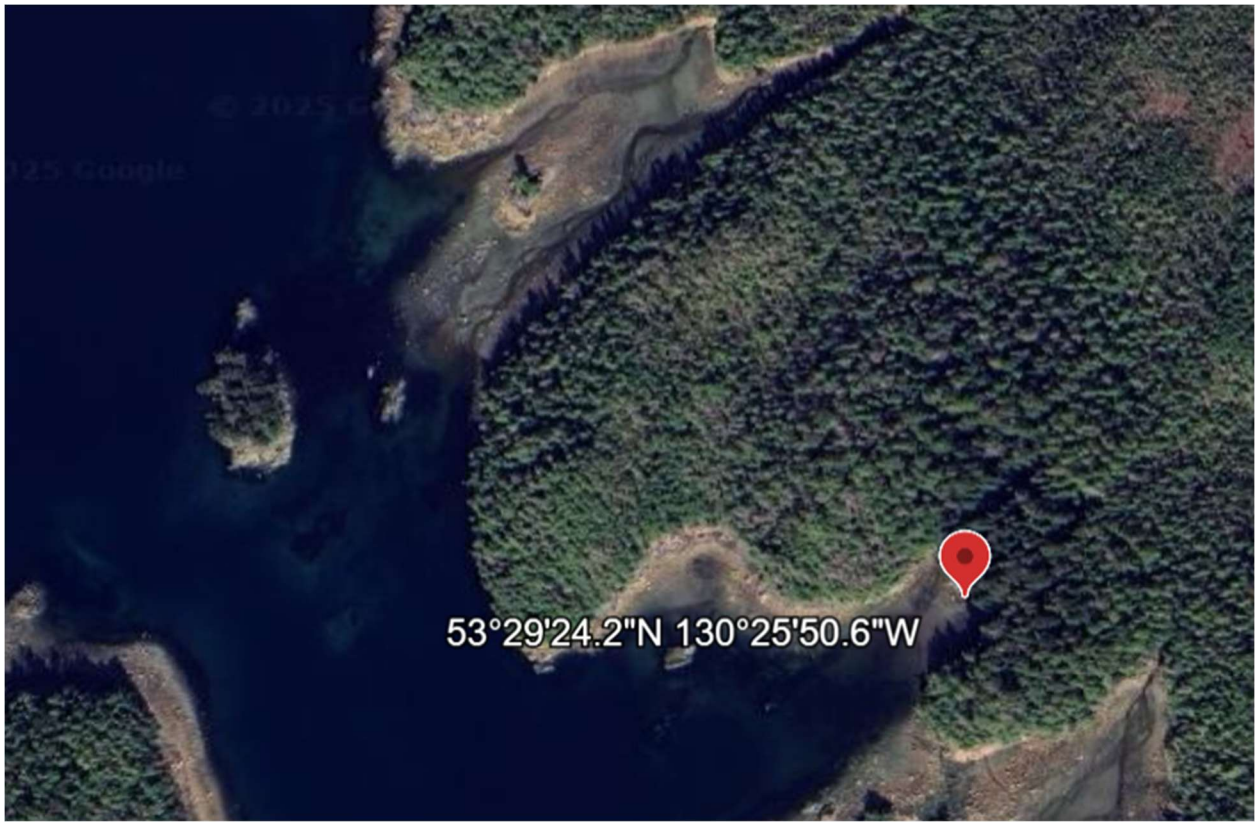
5. Kirkendale Island

The Sneath Islands protect several nice-looking sand beaches, some of which are suitable for camping in good weather.

The campsite on Kirkendale Island is a well-protected, mostly gravel beach (some mud at the bottom) that appears to have First Nation history. There is beach camping on gravel for several tents and potential for upland camping with some light clearing on what appears to be midden.

When we were there most recently, a Saskatoon berry bush was marked as culturally significant. There is a creek in a small cove about 300 metres to the north which is most easily accessed at lower tides.

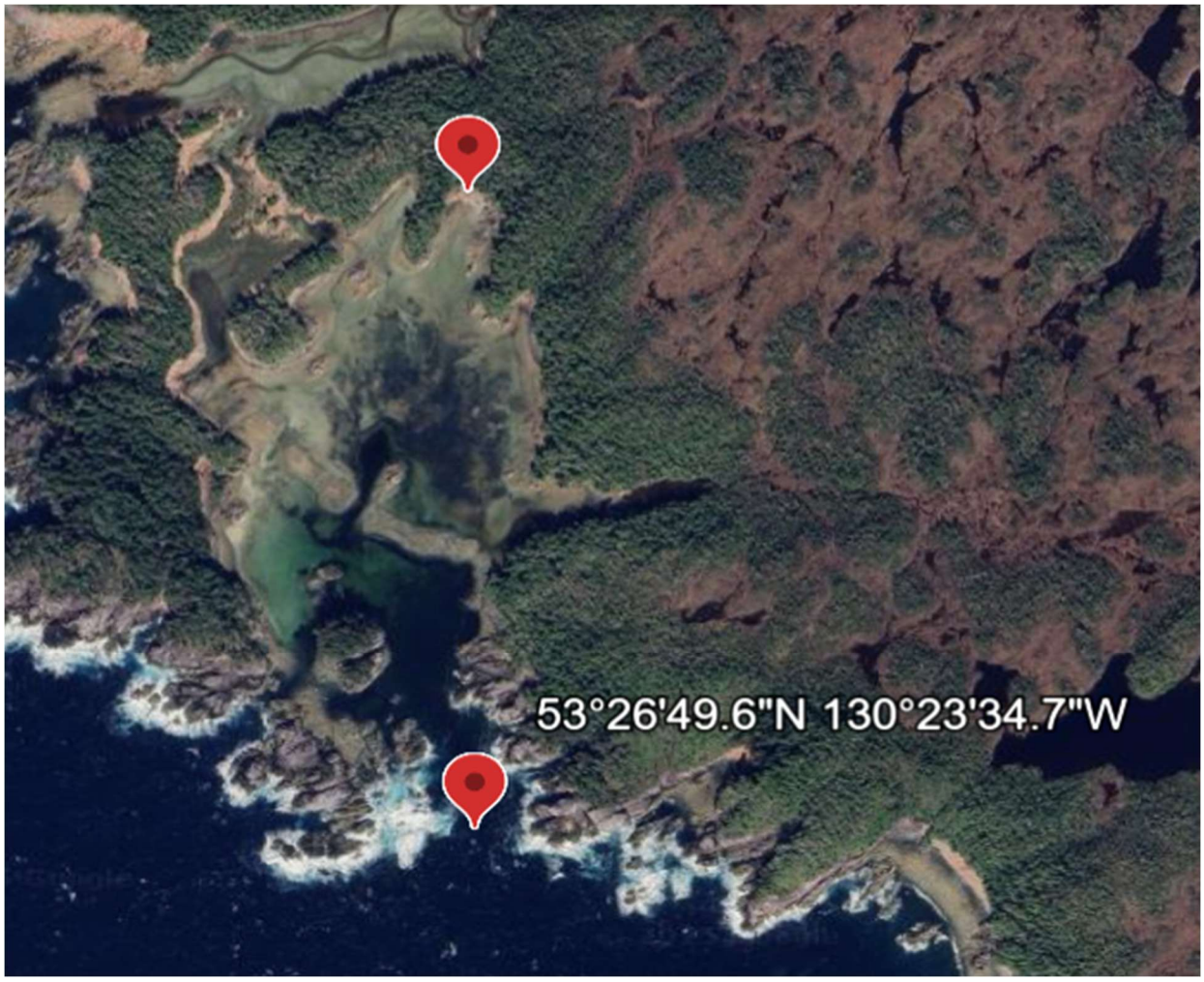
This place has been shown to survive higher tides with southerly wind and low pressure. I had good luck fishing for black rockfish, a favourite of mine, west of the Antle Islands and coho north of Kelp Point.



6. Clam Garden

The site, approximately 1.85 nm south of the Antle Islands, is in my mind one of the more interesting examples of First Nations technology along the coast. Entered from the south through a relatively narrow channel one sees that the southern part of the bay has what appears to be a man-made structural barrier from one side to the other with a narrow channel in the middle. The google image attached shows this quite clearly. A strong creek enters from the east. The area encompassed by the barrier is about 16 hectares or 40 acres.

Camping is at the top of the bay on sand in driftwood. When I was there, in decent weather with settling sea state, adequate tent space above a very high tide was not a problem. Given what I have learned about the effects of low pressure and southerly wind, it is quite possible this beach would disappear in those conditions. The possible conversion of this bay and the inlet immediately to the north into clam gardens must have provided food for a large number of people. Additionally, this site would only need a barrier about 10 metres in length across the entry channel which could be opened and closed to make it a very large fish trap.



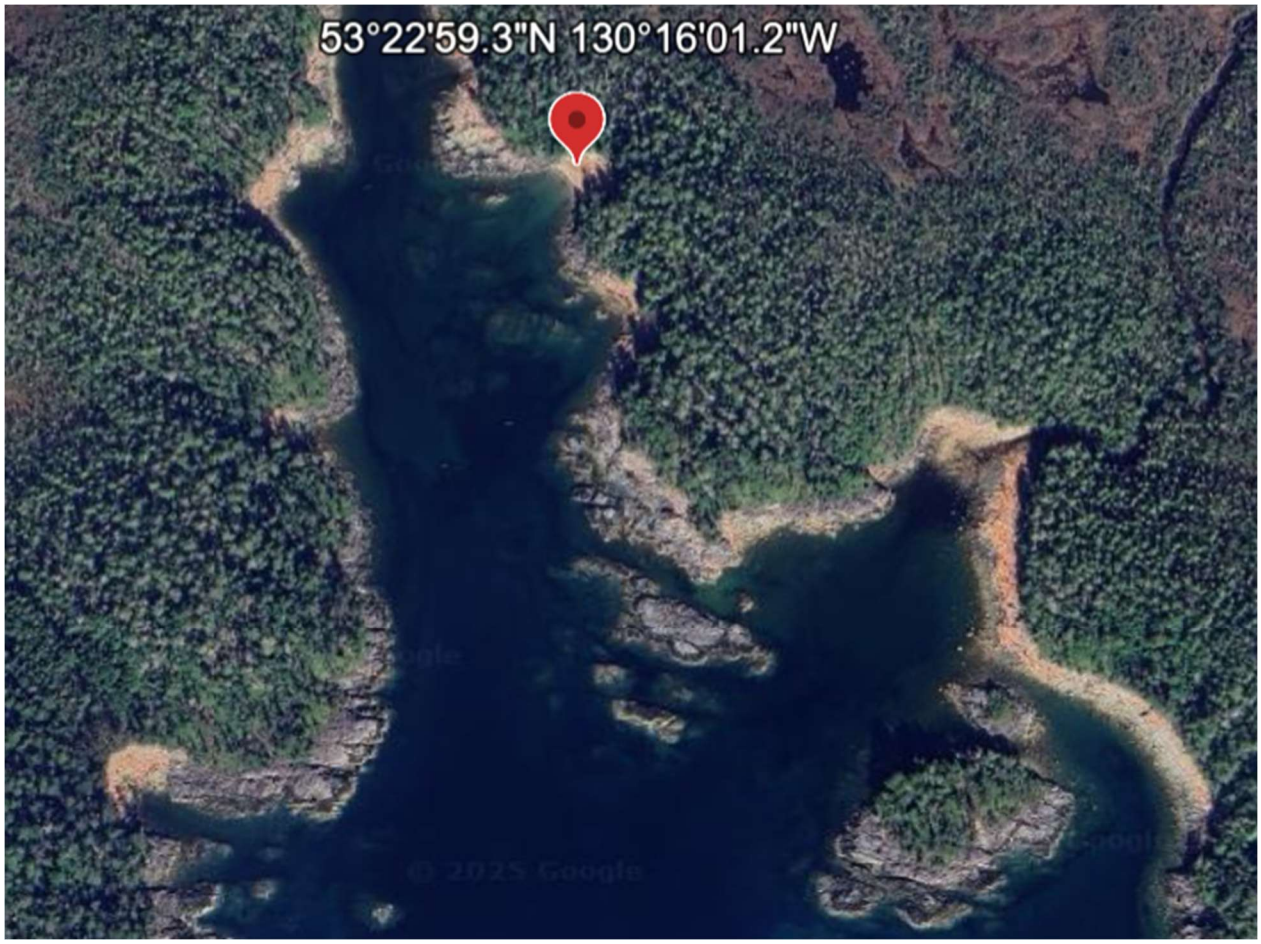
Clam Garden

7. Kelp Point

The site 1.7 nm east of Kelp Point is accessed by turning north along 130° 16’ into a funnel-shaped inlet. The camping beach toward the head of the inlet is a relatively steep sand/grit/gravel that is accessible at tides above 1.5 metres. Below that level are rocks.

When we stayed there in 2011 we had a 21’ tide at Griffith Harbour and there was ample room. When Jon Dawkins stayed there in 2015 they had rain and southerly wind and with a 20’ tide and the place flooded. The difference was the weather and sea state pushing into this funnel shaped inlet.

We are wise to focus on being safe and having fun, but sometimes keeping a smile requires a bit of extra effort.



Enjoy Jon's account of his visit to this site.

The predictive trifecta used for forecasting suffering is fatigue, pain, and anxiety. In my case those elements were wind against current, heavy rain and a gastrointestinal fairy rumbling in my gut. Looking forward to what had been described as the best campsite in the area we entered the tapering bay south of Kelp Point and landed about 1 1⁄2 hours before high slack. There should have been plenty of room yet the water had already risen to the heavy driftwood logs, something that shouldn't have happened. We pulled our boats up onto the logs and set up the parawing to provide some comfort as we warmed, ate and recouped but rain and rising tide turned the beach into standing water and quicksand as we perched on top of the logs and watched the ocean take the beach. Since there was no place large enough to fully set up a tent we crammed our shelters into tiny areas that would allow half of the footprint to be deployed. The rain continued until morning. With water running under and, in some cases, inside of our tents we spent the night marooned in our distorted ripstop envelopes on tiny, inflated air mattress islands. Nothing could get me back out into that rain until morning.....other than the Gastrointestinal Fairy who came calling during the night.

For the full story, visit Jon's website

https://3meterswell.blogspot.com and read "The faces of type III fun".

I stayed there a few years ago and found the same roomy conditions as in 2011. This is the best site in the area with the next good site over 12 nm away in an inlet. For those coming from the north, weather from the south would make it extremely difficult to get from Kirkendale Island to the inlet to the south. And in those conditions stopping at the Kelp Point site might not be a good choice. Plan accordingly.

8. Wreck Islands

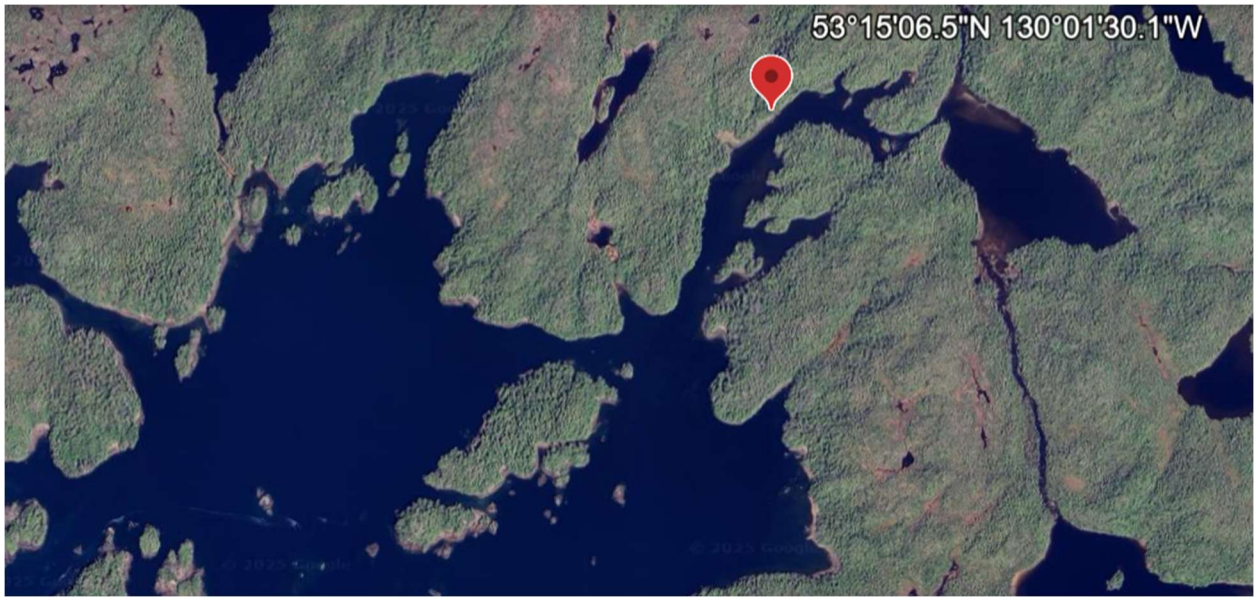
The site east of the Wreck islands would be a choice only in case of necessity, but it does have room for a couple of tents if there is not a lot of rain. It is noted because there just aren't many places along this part of the coast that have a flat spot large enough to pitch a couple of tents above spring tides.

9. South West Inlet

About halfway between Grief and Spearer points is a well-protected bay accessed along 53°14.5 north. Going north from the easterly part of this bay is a south facing inlet that is fed by a large stream. The campsite is a difficult place to land at lower tides because of the steep and rocky beach. At higher tides the beach is flatter. There is a kind of boat ramp with what is left of cross logs.

I don't think this inlet dries but if it did, getting out in the creek would be possible. The site has obvious uses as a camp or house site and stripped cedars suggest a longer term First Nations use.

Camping high on the beach or in the upland with room for many with some light clearing. There is a small creek at the site that provides good water. At high tide it is possible to paddle into a lake but beware as the route becomes a waterfall as the tide ebbs.



10. Terror Point

This site is behind a second island north of Terror Point and accessed from the east. There is a sand/clamshell beach on Banks Island which would likely be fine at moderate tides but perhaps disappears at spring tides. There is no obvious upland option.

Jon Dawkins reports that he was able to find room in the upland immediately south of this site that, with some clearing, might accommodate two tents.

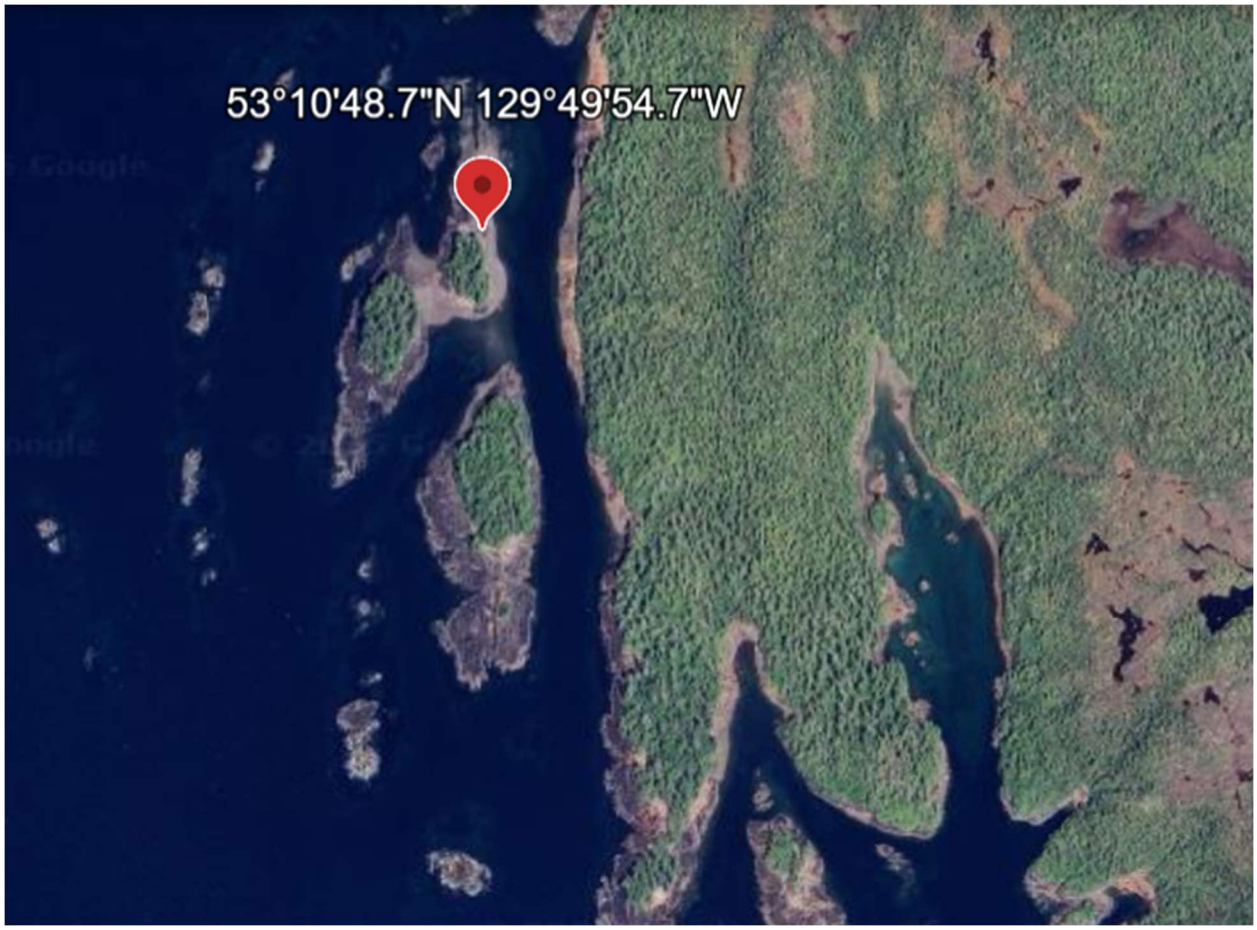
I consider this a secondary site, but it might be useful for those going north not wanting to deal with a northwest wind after Terror Point.

In 2012 three fishermen were stranded at Terror Point after their boat sank. They waited for 9 days before someone noticed where they were. That says something about the remoteness of this area and the lack of local traffic. That should be kept in mind when making decisions.

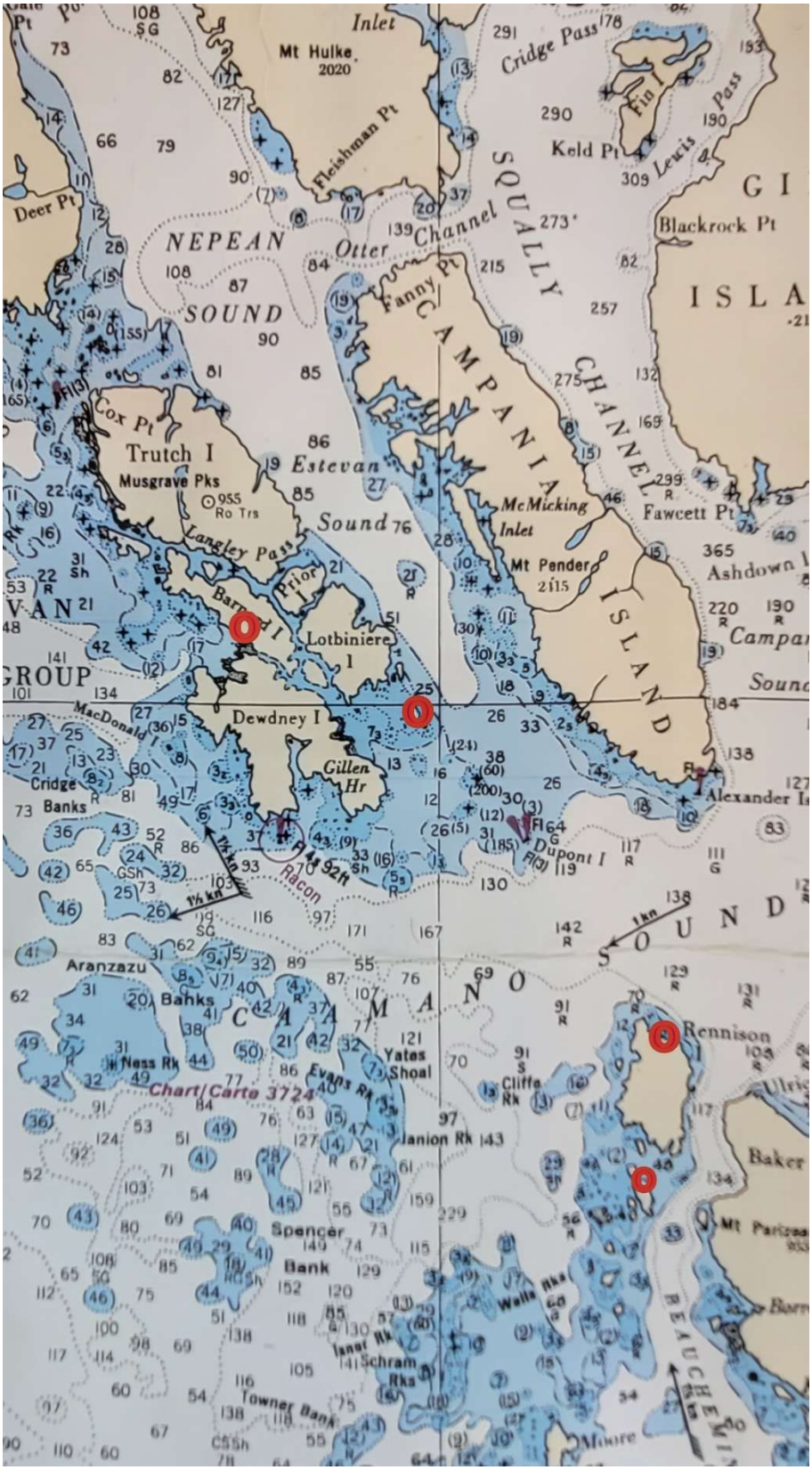
11. Calamity Bay

The primary site in Calamity Bay is on a small islet, the most northerly in a group of three, in the northeast part of the bay. Landing is on a gravel beach facing Banks Island. There are camping opportunities on the northern end of the islet. There is a strong creek that enters at the top of the bay to the north of the islet.

The area east of Terror Point including all of Calamity Bay, is a rockfish conservation where fishing for fin fish is not permitted.



Banks Island to Rennison Island



In many respects this piece is the most challenging one covered in this guide. In the last few years the situation has been made worse by wolves on Campania Island who want into your food and will not take no for an answer.

There are three routes all of which have their challenges and all of which will require a longer crossing. My experience is three transits of Langley passage and one from Banks via Otter Passage to Campania. There are not many good campsites regardless of the route chosen and all will require taking into account tides, currents and afternoon winds.

Calamity Bay to the campsites immediately south of the Jewsbury Peninsula on Campania via Otter Passage.

This choice is about 17.5 nm without an obvious choice for a break other than a couple of rough beaches. And, when you arrive, you may need to deal with persistent wolves. I met people who abandoned the more northerly sites on Campania because of wolves and went to the site toward the south end. That will add another five NM on to your day and might not avoid the wolf issue. Hopefully the situation with the wolves resolves.

This route first needs to have a flood tide near the time when you want to start. Otter Passage runs up to 6 knots so starting a couple of hours before the change to ebb is ideal.

Otter Passage current is based upon Prince Rupert tides and it changes to ebb about one hour forty-five minutes before high tide at Prince Rupert. Otter Passage is a secondary current station based upon Prince Rupert so sort out the timing before you leave home. There is a tide station at the Block Islands in Otter Passage and that reaches high water about twenty five minutes before high tide at Prince Rupert.

There are two principal weather/sea state issues with this route. The first is outflow winds in the morning coming from as far away as Kitimat which may meet the incoming current from Otter Passage. A good estimate of the outflow wind speed can be gleaned from the readings at Nanakwa Shoal.

Some of this issue can be avoided by paddling behind the islands to the north of Trutch Island. The whole problem can be avoided by waiting for the outflow to ease later in the morning.

The second sea state issue is the likelihood, in good weather, of strong northwesterly winds developing around mid-day that will blow down Principe Channel into Estevan Sound and on down into Laredo Channel. My experience is that these can be very strong and they will be on your beam crossing over to Campania if you wait too long.

John Kimantas indicates a campsite on Prior Island near the entrance to Langley Passage. I have stayed there and don’t recommend it unless necessary.

Calamity Bay to Campania via Langley Passage

This route to Campania is about one nautical mile further than via Otter Passage but there may be some advantages.

Langley Passage floods toward the middle from the three main entrances. The optimal situation is to be about the middle of Langley Passage at high tide. This would mean a flood in from the west and then the early part of the ebb on the way out to the east.

Currents at the west entrance are manageable when they are against you, the east entrance is not so easy. At low tides the east entrance is shallow and narrow and not manageable for most paddlers.

An advantage of this route is that it is possible to stop for a break at the old barracks in Ethelda Bay and the last time I was there several years ago camping was possible if not desirable.

The problems with crossing from the Estevan Group to Campania are the same as with the Otter Passage route. If you are delayed getting out of Langley Passage there is the risk of strong afternoon winds in Estevan Sound. Also, once you get to Campania the wolf problem remains.

12. Hickey Island

There is a variation of the Langley Passage route that may be easier and that is to exit via the channel that enters from the south. I haven't been that way but on satellite images it does not look overly constricted or shallow.

John Kimantas does not record a good beach on the Hickey Islands but there appears to be two good options, both on the largest Hickey Island. Keep in mind that John did not have the benefit of good satellite images when he did his survey and both options on the Hickey Islands were probably not visible to him in a kayak.

As John noted, the best place is a small islet about one nautical mile west of the Hickey Island, but that is an ecological reserve.

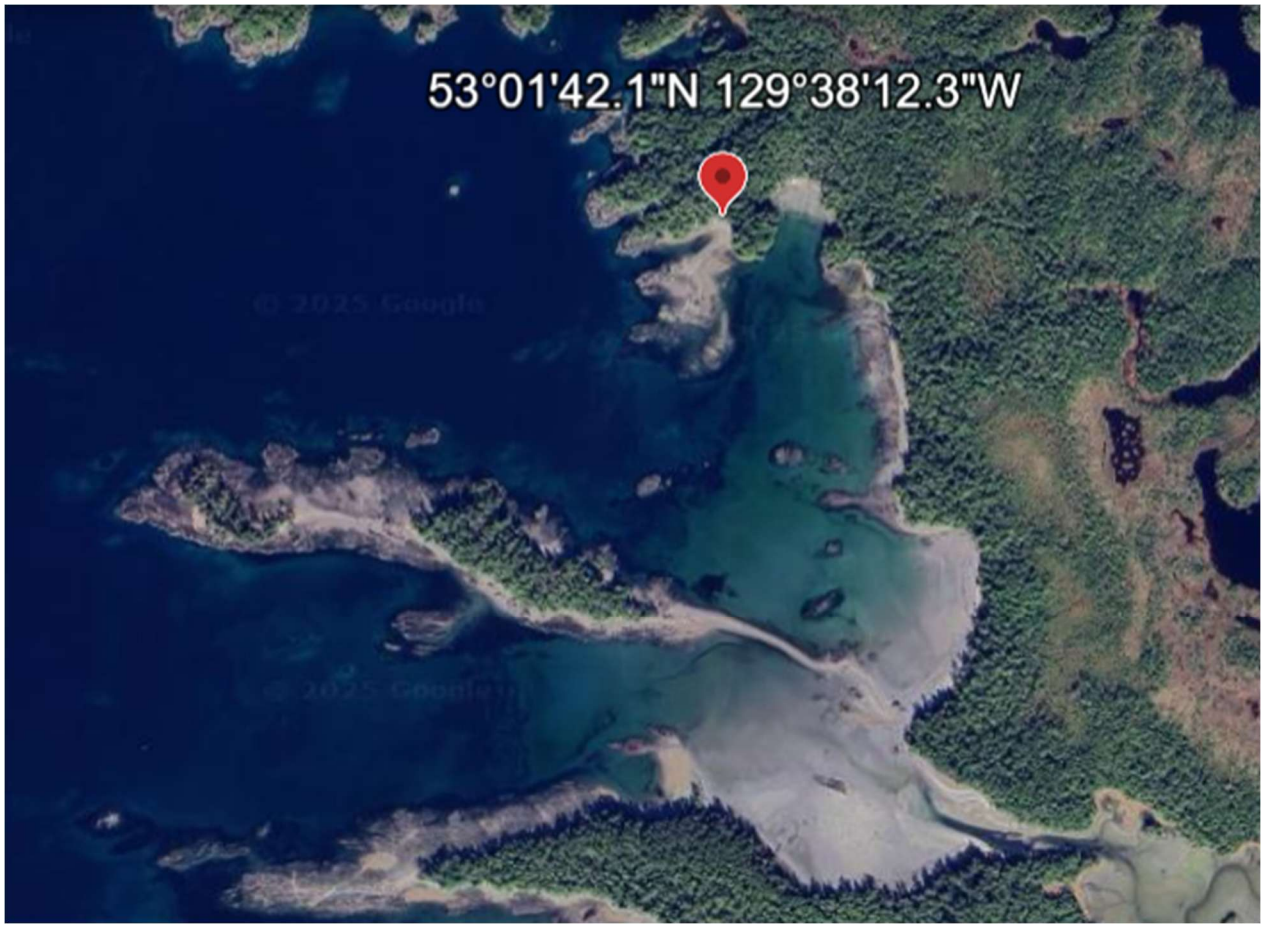
On this variation the distance from Calamity Bay to the Hickey islands is 16.8 NM. Again, it would be best to enter from the west on a flood and exit to the south on an ebb. An advantage of this route is that once into Langley Passage paddling would be in waters that are very protected. From the Hickey Island options, it is approximately 10 NM to the campsite on the north shore of Rennison Island.

13. Oswald Bay - Calamity Bay to Rennison Island via west side of the Estevan Group.

There is good camping on Barnard Island in Oswald Bay. It is located in a small pocket about 600 metres NNW of the entrance to the channel that separates Barnard Island from Dewdney Island. The large beach closer to the channel dries for a very long distance and might only be useful if coming and going on a high tide. The site has a gravel beach and room in the upland for several tents.

The distance from the Calamity Bay site is about 11 nm. The site was first identified by John Kimantas, and Jon Dawkins, who is helping with this guide, has been there.

From the Oswald Bay site it is possible to paddle in the channel to the east that runs north of Dewdney Island. Kimantas says that a tide of 19.5 feet at Prince Rupert is needed to get through as the area is very shallow. Using this route, it would be about 14 nm to the campsite on Rennison Island. Going around the west side of Dewdney Island from Oswald Bay would be about 18 nm and run the risk of mid-day northwest winds even with an early start.



Crossing to Rennison Island

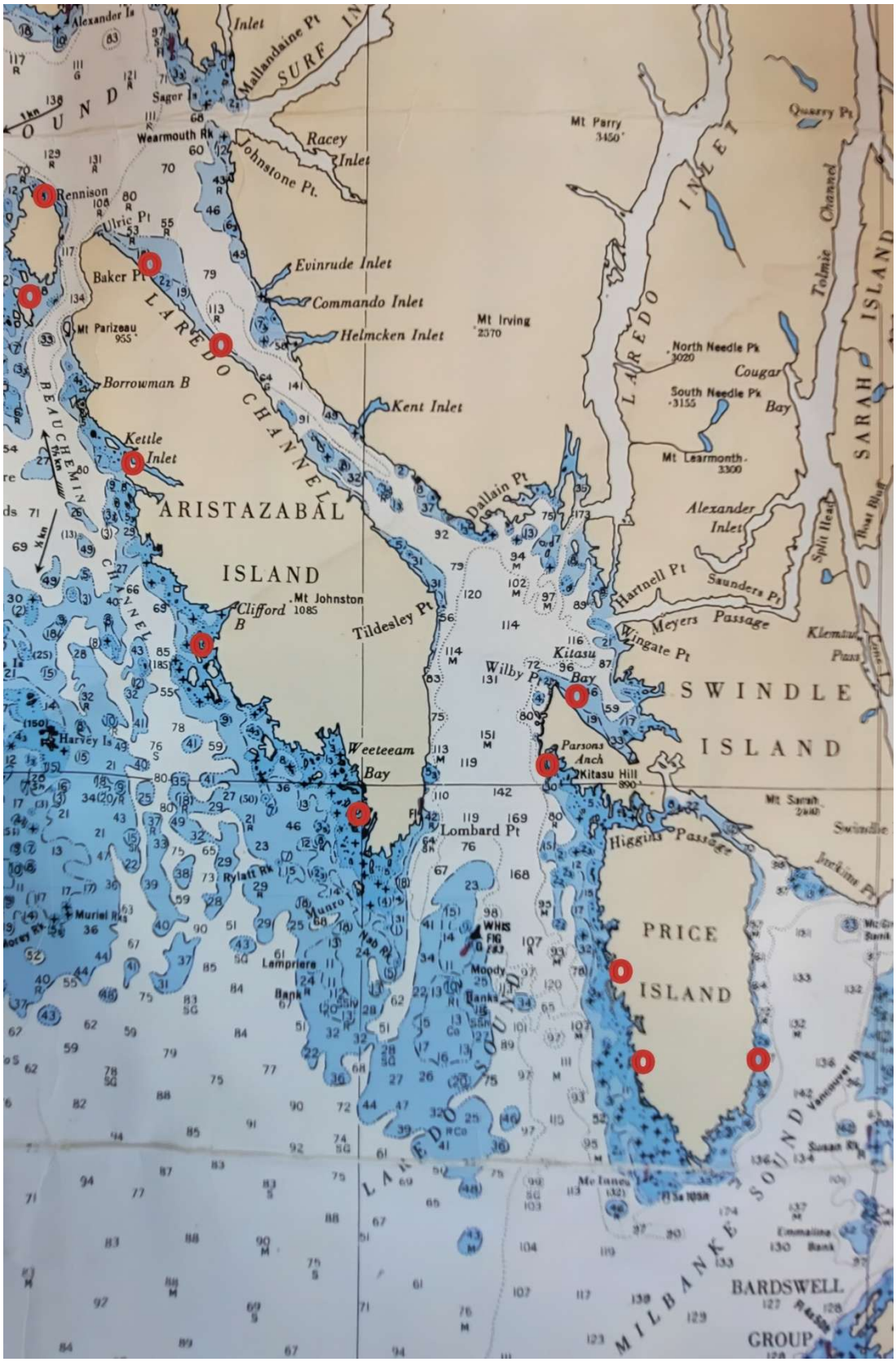
Regardless of which route is chosen, at some point, a crossing to Rennison Island is required. From the Hickey Islands or from the main campsite on Campania it is about 10 nm. The main issue in this area is strong flood and ebb currents that enter and exit in the large channel between Rennison Island and Dewdney Island.

The flood runs mainly from southwest to northeast with some of the water turning up into Estevan sound. The ebb is the reverse with about the same strength.

During one crossing from Rennison Island to Campania Island I stopped my boat in the water and the GPS recorded a drift speed of two knots.

I think the current timing is fairly close to the tides in this area. It is important to give full consideration to the effect of these currents, and if possible, plan to use them. Not doing this will likely result in ending up in the wrong place and having to paddle against a strong current to recover.

Aristazabal and Price Islands



For me, this area of the outer coast is, maybe, the easiest place to be in remote and rugged territory, while at the same time suited to lower risk. It is accessible in two days from the ferry at Klemtu or three days from the ferry terminal at Bella Bella. On both routes, difficult sea states can be avoided with some planning and patience. These days, this area is my choice for a bit of camping, reading, and just being in the territory.

The original guides for this area left Laredo Channel and Sound to John Kimantas. This time both the east and west sides of Aristazabal are included along with some suggestions for avoiding risk while in the area.

West of Aristazabal Island starting from Rennison Island in the north down to Conroy Island, about 9 nm west of the Arriaga Islands in the south, is a line of islands and reefs that largely stop any wave energy coming from the southwest or west.

Combined with the various islands that provide lee side paddling, this means that there is only about 1.5 nm of exposure to the open ocean toward the south end of the island, and another 700 metres when leaving the camp in SE Weeteeam Bay before turning behind shelter for the route around the bottom of the island.

The offshore barriers also have the effect of funnelling flooding tides from nine nm down to about one nm near the north end of Beauchemin Channel.

This probably explains why the islands, now called the Anderson Islands, south of Rennison Island and the other islands strung out toward the south were called the Rip Tide Islands on the Admiralty charts.

So, the risk to be avoided is paddling south with northwest wind during a flood tide. In good weather just starting early in the day to avoid the afternoon northwest wind usually is sufficient. If you happen to be going south to north, there will be a good push from flood tides.

14. North Rennison Island

This site sits where it needs to be to act as a landing place for those coming south and a starting place for those going north.

In a Bay approximately 1/2 nm east of Oswald Point there are three beaches that all have some sand for landing. We thought the more westerly beach was the best for beach camping.

We learned from experience after the original survey, that at spring tides, most of the camping opportunities on the beach flood. Jon Dawkins stayed there in 2015 and they cleared room for two tents in the upland, in the west corner of the more easterly beach.

Water is available in a north-facing cove 500 metres to the east.

15. North Anderson Island

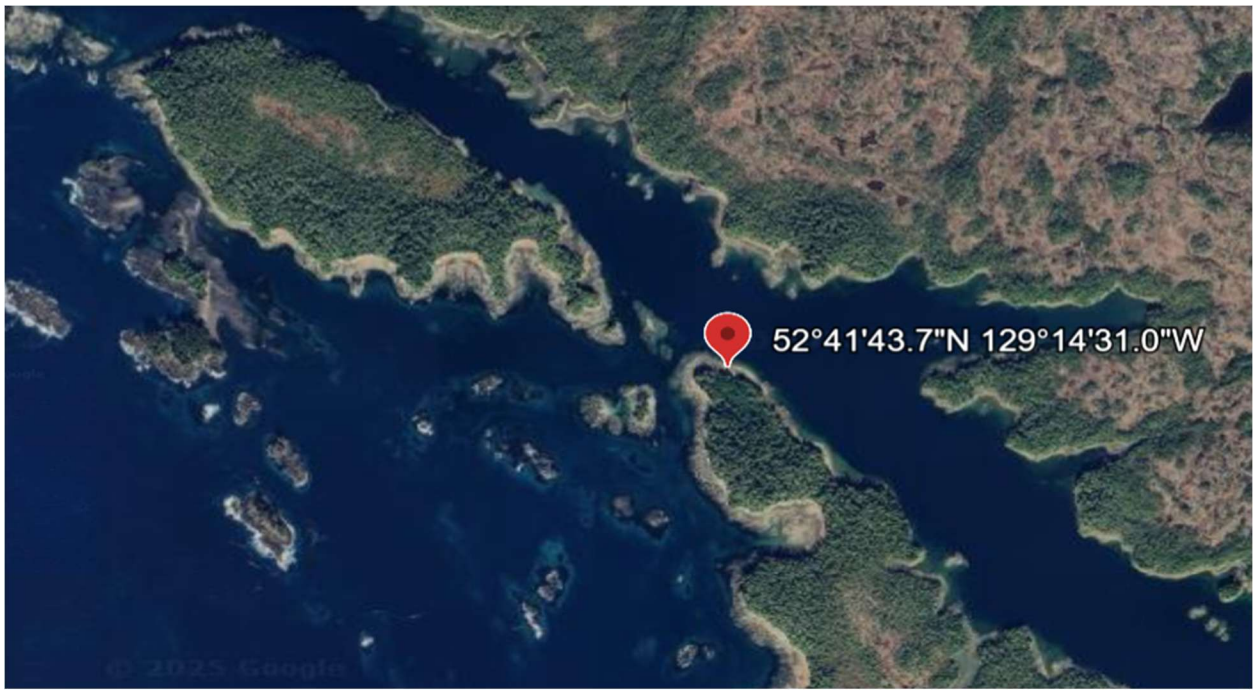
This site along the north shore of the larger, most easterly Anderson Island is the long-established camping site for this area. There is an old cabin accessed near the east end of the beach and recent information suggests there may be 8 or 9 upland tent sites.

We have had success spin casting for coho from the rocks that bound the west side of the beach.

The area near the north end of Aristazabal Island is generally good for coho in the summer and supports the North King Fishing Lodge in Borrowman Bay.

16. Kettle Inlet

The campsite on the south side of Kettle Inlet near the Northwest tip of Aristazabal Island has a good all tide beach of sand/gravel. There is beach camping for several tents at spring tides and many more at lower tide levels. There is a good creek across the inlet to the north. An issue with this site is that at very low tides the channels between the string of islands to the northwest dry and this adds an extra nautical mile to your day if you want to go south.



Midnight Musing

We landed in this perfect, protected narrow inlet with a good sandy beach and a creek.

During the night, the wind started to funnel on to the land through the inlet with strong gusts. I guess my tent wasn't well anchored and the weather side started to lift and woke me up.

Without thinking and half asleep, I got out of the tent to put some rocks on the corners. It was a warm partially moonlit night. I looked around to enjoy the night and when I looked back, the tent was gone.

Looking inland, there it was, rolling down the beach with all my night gear inside getting the clothes dryer treatment. It was an odd feeling standing there wearing nothing but a toque and a perplexed look as your tent looks for a spot more to its liking.

In good time all but the tent pegs and my dignity were recovered.

Glenn Lewis

17. Clifford Bay

This site is immediately to the southeast of Babbage Island at the northern end of the most northerly Normansell Island, and has a good sand beach down to almost the bottom.

There is upland camping for many tents and beach camping at other than spring tides. The site is well protected from any weather arriving from the south.

Water is available in Flux Creek at the head of Clifford Bay. Water is also available and more easily accessed at the head of the small cove on Aristazabal Island approximately 0.5 nm to the southeast of the site.

In the area around Clifford Bay and on the mud flats to the east of the Normansell Islands you can often see groups of sandhill cranes.

The channels created by the Normansell Islands create quite strong currents on both floods and ebbs. It is possible to stay along the shore of Aristazabal at tides above 2.6 metres at Beauchemin Channel.

A secondary site on the northeast corner of the most southerly Normansell Island was suitable when the original survey was done but covered with kelp when I was there several years later.

Good fishing for ground fish (ling cod and many types of rockfish) and midwater fish (black rockfish) can be found off the large rock at the south end of the most southerly Normansell Island.

From this spot to the north end of the Arriaga islands is the longest exposure to the open ocean along the west side of Aristazabal.

The most protected route to the primary site in SE Weeteeam Bay has paddlers turning west into the islands and islets before the protection of the Arriaga Islands is lost.

The paddle from the Normansell Islands into Weeteeam Bay would likely be quite difficult with southerly wind or waves given the exposures and the many rocks and reefs that would add to the sea state.

18. SE Weeteeam Bay

This site is a former Kayak Bill site that someone chose to dismantle about 5 or 6 years ago. The site is a fine sand beach with some upland camping and rooms for many tents. The beach is well protected from swell but has some exposure to southerly wind.

A secondary site on the north end of the island immediately to the west might be a better choice to ride out stormy weather.

There is a creek behind a small island about 0.75 nm north of the campsite that is most easily accessed at medium to low tides. If you can't like this place, maybe you should think about different pastime. When in this area I fish off the south point of a large rock approximately 3/4 nm to the SW of the campsite.

The route from this campsite to the east side of Aristazabal Island is all protected by offshore islands except for about 700 metres. Be cautious in this short stretch as the water is shallow and there are several large boomers.

The paddle along the south shore of Aristazabal is interesting with many islets and channels, all well protected from offshore energy, that can be used at higher tides. At lower tides a more southerly course inside the barrier islands but not in the channels closer to the main island is recommended.

19. SE Aristazabal

This site, a little over a mile south of Lombard Point, is another former Kayak Bill site which he called his receiving camp. It was a place for him to stop after crossing from Higgins Passage. Like the site in SE Weeteeam Bay, someone chose to remove the remnants of Bill's camp. There is room in the upland for several tents and some beach camping.

For those choosing to cross from this area to Price Island one risk is leaving too late in the day and having to deal with Northwest wind in the early afternoon.

What I do is check the weather report for McInnes Island light station at 4 am and if there is outflow from the east (Seaforth Channel) that means that the Northwest wind will likely be held in check until at least noon. I have been preparing to cross when winds at the light station were close to 20 knots, none of which made it to the south end of Aristazabal. The highlands on the east side of Price Island stop the outflow from coming directly across Laredo Sound.

This is probably not a good crossing to attempt with southerly weather especially if the tide is on an ebb. The tidal currents seem to be quite strong on the Aristazabal side and ease as one moves toward the east.

Leaving the camp on Aristazabal, aim at Kitasoo Hill and you will end up at Higgins Passage. Cruise ships transit Laredo Sound, so keep an eye out for them and if there is poor visibility, you may want to check in with vessel traffic in Prince Rupert.

Laredo Channel and Kitasoo Bay.

When the weather is nice in the summer the mountains heat during the morning, and sometime around noon a strong onshore wind will manifest as a Northwesterly starting up in Principe Channel and blowing down through Estevan Sound, Laredo Channel and Sound, Kitasoo Bay, and then north of Kitasoo Hill and along the south shore of Swindle Island, heading for Seaforth Channel.

My experience is that the wind can rise from light to 15-20 knots very quickly. Generally, the strongest wind is in mid-afternoon. Laredo Channel has current speeds of up to 2 knots around the Ramsbotham Islands, and a flood against this onshore wind can create very difficult and potentially dangerous sea states. John Kimantas reports, I think from the *Sailing Directions*, that Laredo Channel floods for about 8 hours and ebbs for about 4 in each cycle. Something like that is my experience. The solution is quite easy. Be where you want to stop before lunch.

Coming from Ulric Point on the north end of Aristazabal Island down Laredo Channel offers two primary campsites on the Aristazabal side.

On the east side of the channel, a paddler is hard pressed to find a place to get out of their boat and I know of no easy place to camp except the IR at Disju and that is not open to the public.

20. Baker Point

Baker Point is a prominent sand gravel point 2.5 nm south of Ulric Point. There are large beaches on both sides of the point, In good weather the south side of the point is more protected and out of the afternoon wind. Both beaches are exposed to southerly weather. The beach north of the point is a good place to spin cast for coho. If you choose to camp on the south side, at lower tides the beach is guarded by large boulders which make launching difficult. There is a creek.

21. Shotbolt Point

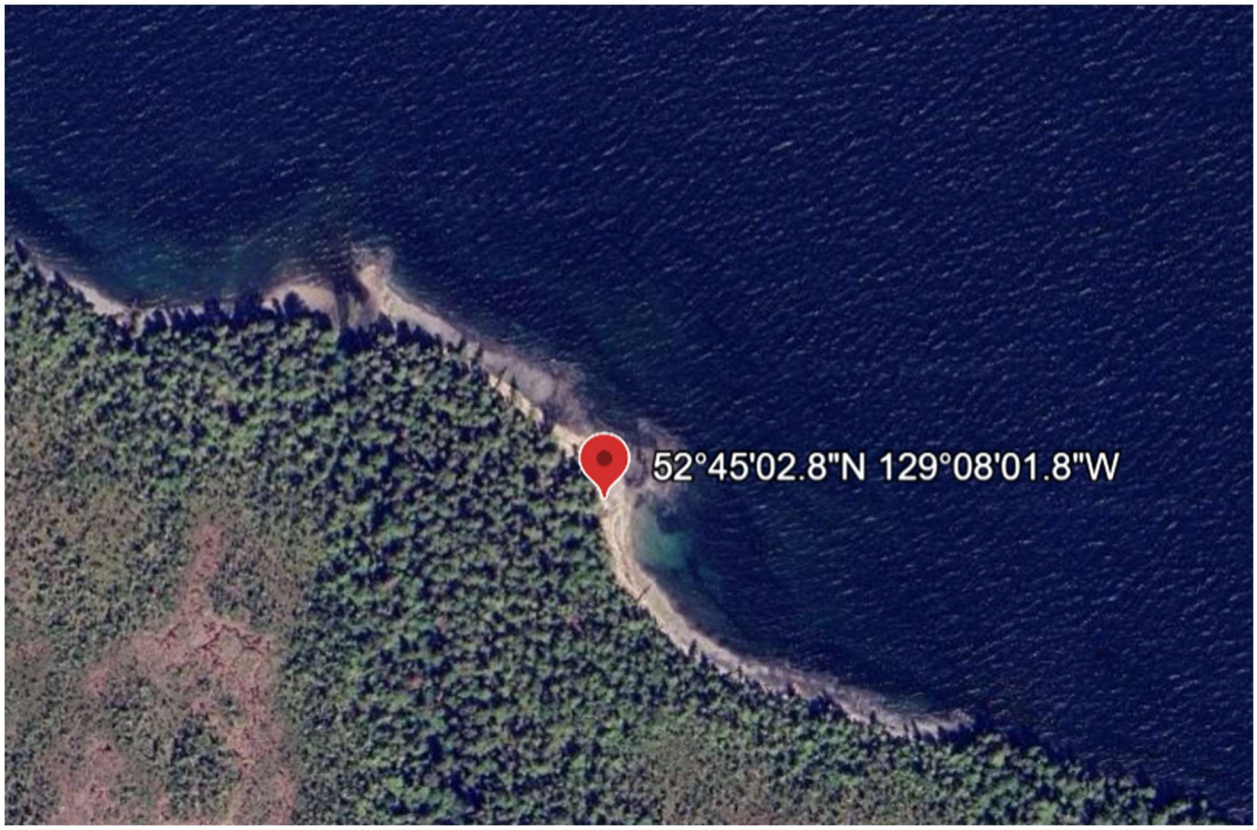
My preferred site is about 3/4 of a nautical mile north of Shotbolt Point where there is a southeast facing sand ramp down to the lowest tides. There is ample beach camping on sand above summer highs.

There is one of the best creeks on this side of Aristazabal about 200 metres NW from the camp which is easily accessible along the beach.

This place is out of afternoon northwest winds and very protected from all forms of southerly wind and a very good place to ride out some poor weather. If you don't see a wolf or two between this place and Baker Point, you are unlucky.

A benefit of this place is that it puts Wilby Point or Monk Bay within reach before afternoon winds start to rise. I have paddled down this east side of Aristazabal with a flood current and except for a few headlands the current is not an impediment near to the shore.

For those using this route, there is a north-facing sand cove 3/4 nm northwest of Tildesley Point behind some reefs that is a good place for a break before crossing to Wilby Point.



22. Wilby Point

For me, wilderness camping does not get much better than sitting at Wilby Point, watching the sun come over Klemtu Mountain with a cup of coffee and a good book; and, from time to time, a morning visit from a local wolf doing the rounds of the beaches.

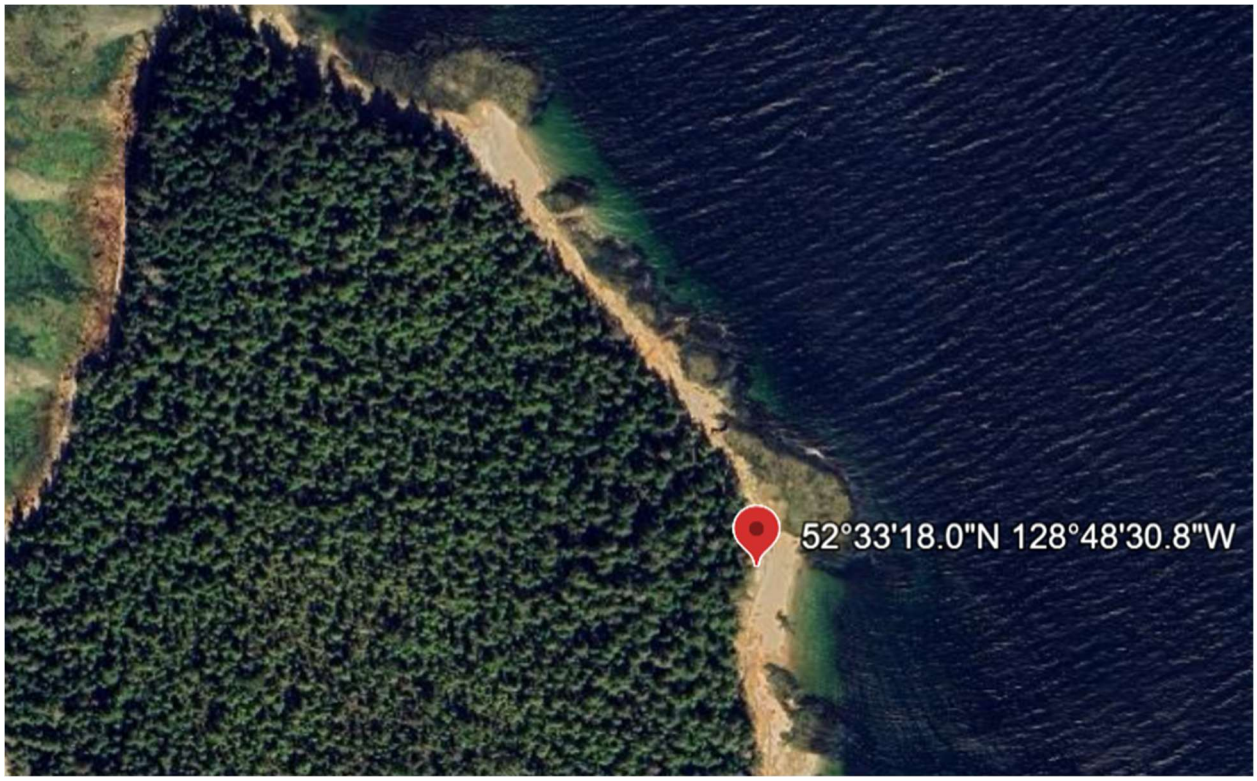
There are two sand ramps coming into Kitasoo Bay.

The first is about 175 metres from the point, faces a little to the north, and has coarser gravel; it holds a fantastic view but beware of setting up camp at highest tides as you may have to move your tent up from the lapping waters if you don't.

The second is a little over 500 metres from the point, faces more toward the south and has finer gravel. I prefer this site as it has much more room for camping both on the beach and in the upland and it is out of the afternoon wind.

Spin casting for coho is often good at the more northerly beach and trolling along the shore or using a buzz bomb from the point towards the land is often successful.

There is a long beach that stretches to the south which has some weak streams that drain the upland.



In poor weather with wind from the south, the Wilby Point area is completely exposed as the weather comes unimpeded north of Kitasoo Hill. During this situation, a retreat to Milne Island, which is protected from southerly weather, is a better choice.

For those paddling from Klemtu and heading north up Laredo Channel, Monk Bay, a lunch site in the Wild Coast guide, now has some upland and beach camping. This site saves about two hours of paddling before starting north in Laredo Channel and may help avoid afternoon wind.

Higgins Passage

Until a few years ago the big, probably former village, site at the west end of Higgins Passage was among the most used in the area and camping was allowed. Then the Kitasoo decided that they no longer want people to camp there. That decision came after Jon Dawkins reported stopping there and the place had been left a mess. It is indeed regrettable, although understandable, that this place is no longer available for camping as it is a strategic site for crossing to and from Aristazabal or paddling from Pidwell Reefs to the east to Wilby Point further to the north.

For those coming from Wilby Point and going to Pidwell Reefs, the easiest transit is in the channel south of Lohbrunner Island which requires about 7 feet of water. A risk is that if you leave the paddle from Higgins until too late in the day, the northwest wind, which blows through the lowlands north of Kitasoo Hill, will cause unrest along the south shore of Swindle Island.

For those going south along Price Island, the protection of the islets and reefs will provide quite good cover.

23. Larkin Point

For those coming from Pidwell Reefs and heading for Wilby Point, a risk is that by the time you get to Larkin Point, about 2.5 nm south of Wilby Point, there might be a strong northwesterly afternoon wind in your face.

In this situation there is no established campsite, but there is a small islet in the midst of several reefs and shallows 700 metres SE of Larkin Point. I thought the east side of this islet would survive high tides.

This place is included as a possible campsite, for no other reason than I have never been able to find anything better in this area.

24. West side of Price Island

Both the west and east side of Price Island are very rugged and offer very few opportunities to land and fewer places to camp.

On the west side, shallow ground extends well offshore with the result that there are about 400 islands or islets and uncountable rocks and reefs scattered between Day Point in the south and Higgins Passage. A positive aspect of this situation is that there is a route that stays close to the main island shore that, except for a couple of short sections, is very well protected from offshore wave energy. The chart for this area is an old survey at a scale that gives little help with the convoluted shore. What works is satellite photos. Originally, I used Google satellite images and drew longitudes and latitudes to be used with a GPS. In recent years the resolution of satellite images has improved significantly, and it is now fairly easy to plan a route that stays in the lee of the islets and reefs. As of November 2025, the Google images show the situation at high tide and Bing images show it at low tide. The low tide images make it much easier to follow the protected route as they show more channels and reefs.

Another effect of the shallow water is that fishing for groundfish is poor.

On the west side of Price Island there is one primary campsite. Rudolph Bay is noted as a secondary site and camping may be possible, particularly during neap tides inside the Bay. Another site, a little north of where a paddler turns east into Day Passage, has potential for some tents and is a protected place to take a break.

The primary site is five nm south of Higgins Passage and it is a good one; It is a well-protected large sand beach with a good creek. I have been in this place with strong northwest and southerly winds and neither situation caused significant waves on the beach.

During tides lower than springs camping on the main beach and among the logs is good with room for many.

At spring tides, or just to feel more secure, immediately to the south is a small pocket beach which will survive all summer tides. That site has room for many tents but may require moving a bit of driftwood.

South of this site are a series of small islands. I think that at very high tides it might be possible to paddle in the lee of these islands but that has never been possible in the six times that I have been there. The route around these islands is one of the exposures, with northwest wind, and I think it is a good place to remain alert for boomers as there are many and the shallow water causes a lot of echo off the rocks. With southerly winds, the exposure is minimal.

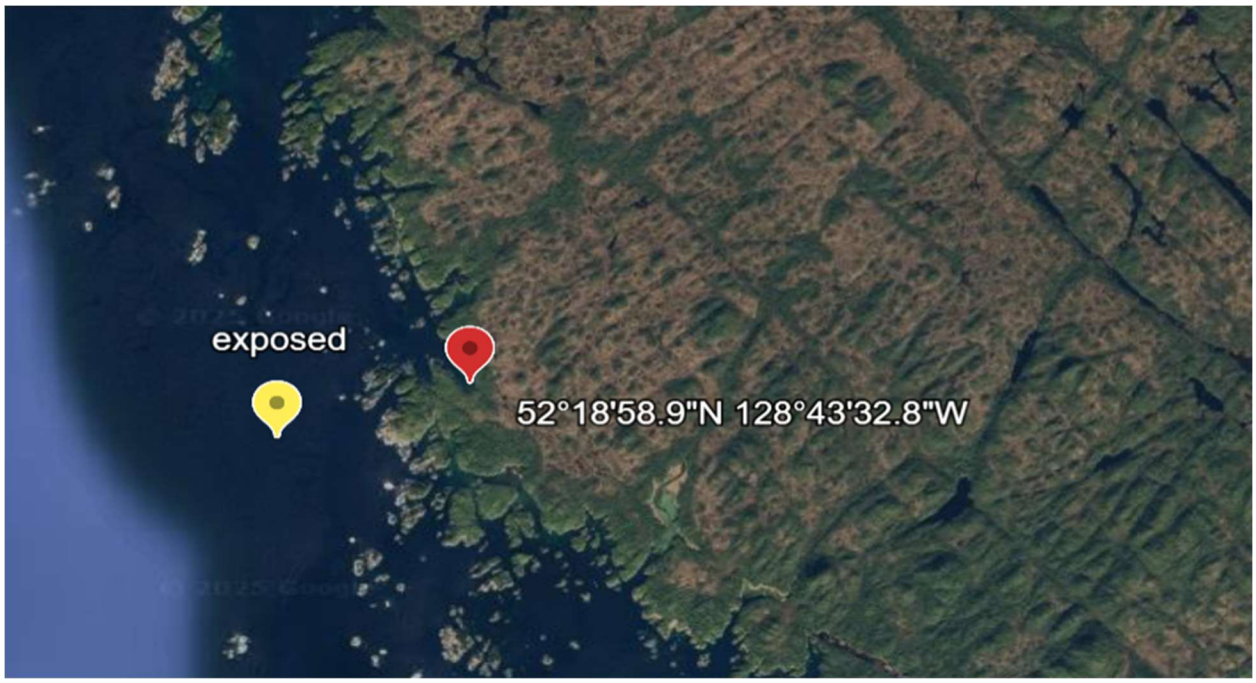

52°23'15.9"N 128°45'15.9"W

25. South side of Price Island

Toward the bottom of Price Island where the shore turns toward the southeast, the protection of the islands that forms a kind of inside passage is lost for approximately 0.75 nm. My experience is that during good weather with wind and wave energy coming from the west or northwest, the shallow water and exposure to any offshore swell means that a paddler should expect some chop and disorganized seas. I have never found this place to be a significant risk in this situation.

The situation is different with poor weather and southerly winds. With wind waves and swell coming from the south and being redirected by the rocks and reefs, the 3/4 mile of exposure may well be more than some paddlers find comfortable.

Coming from the north, a stop at the secondary site in this area is a choice. Coming from the east side of Price through Day Passage on days with south wind and sea state, perhaps waiting for a better day before leaving the east Price site is wisest. Once you are at the west end of Day Passage there is no good bail out choice and if you turn north in rough conditions, the situation is likely to get worse before you find shelter 0.75 nm to the north.



Day Passage is well protected from almost all offshore energy. The first time that I paddled around the south end of Price Island the only information available was a cruising guide which talked about the good beach combing in the area. I foolishly thought this must mean there were beaches. I have been to this place six times looking for a potential campsite and even using satellite images I cannot find a place that is worthy of the name that can be accessed through a full tide cycle.

26. East side of Price Island

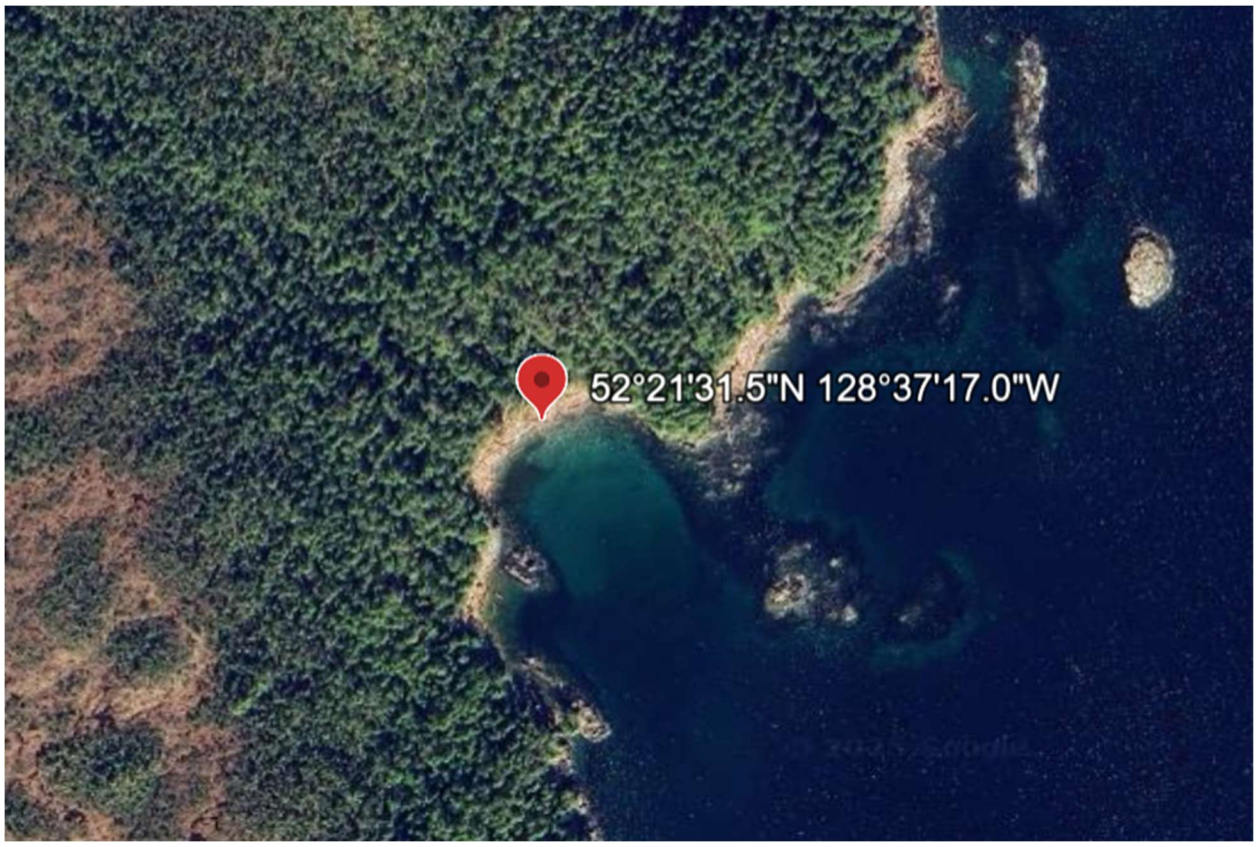
This area has less shallow water near the shore and, with only a couple of exceptions its beaches are steep and coarse rock.

When the guides were first published, we had used south arm of Langford Cove for camping. It is okay on the beach at lower tides, but it floods at springs. On one trip, I cleared room for one tent in the upland about mid-beach. The main factor recommending this place was that we were unaware of any other choice.

Since then, a small cove with a sand ramp facing southeast has been located one mile north of Langford Cove. This is, by far, the best (and really only) choice for camping on this side of Price Island. The upper part of this beach has a fairly heavy load of driftwood and logs which only allow beach camping at tides below 15 feet at Day Point. In southerly weather, waves would reduce that option. Fortunately, someone cleared some tent sites in the upland which can easily accommodate 3 tents and probably 5 or 6 with a squeeze.

There is a good creek.

Between about 10-12 feet of water there are some boulders in the sand which form a partial barrier but the last time I was there it was quite easy to clear a path through for my kayak cart. Above and below the rocks is a good sand beach.



Crossing from Price Island toward the east will mean dealing with quite strong currents flowing north/south. I have been told that on an ebb, where this current meets incoming swell, toward the south end of Price Island, a heavy turbulence can develop. For paddlers crossing toward Dallas Island, about mid-channel there will likely be some chop during ebb currents.

I have always been able to catch a salmon trolling near to Boulder Head.

West coast of Calvert Island

The west side of Calvert Island is a very different experience from the outer coast covered by this guide to the north.

For the most part, while the landform is fairly flat, the sea, other than near the shore is not very shallow. There are no lines of islands and reefs to protect the beaches and any protection from Haida Gwaii has long since disappeared. The result is predictable and that is a series of sand beaches created by the pounding of swell coming from offshore.

When we did the original survey in 2013 we had calm weather with swell of only 0.7 metres at the West Sea Otter Buoy when checking the many small beaches in the northern half of the island. Most of the time, the swell would be higher, and the result would be more surf on many of those small beaches.

In this version of the guide, the intent is to identify those places where landing and camping is possible on beaches that will have little if any surf when there are 2 or 3 metres of swell offshore at the buoys.

Tidal currents are not strong along most of that part of outer Calvert that lies north to south except at the north and, sometimes, at the south ends.

North of Calvert Island is Hakai Pass. A large amount of water moves to and from Fitzhugh Sound at speeds of up to about 4 knots. On an ebb, when that water meets incoming swell, the predictable result is very rough water and possibly, standing waves. I have read about standing waves 20 feet high at times of large swell.

In the summer, that sort of thing is not very likely but even with moderate swell, a good deal of unrest is probably around the northwest corner of Calvert on ebbs. Some of the current from Hakai turn south at the Surf Islands so, the difficult sea state caused by swell against current may continue for some distance south along the coast.

The east side Calvert Island has some mountains and highlands. These seem to contribute to the afternoon northwesterly phenomena that occurs along our coast in good weather.

More than in most areas, my advice is to start paddling early in the morning and get to your beach before the afternoon winds start. The entire coast of Calvert Island is fully exposed to poor weather in the form of Southerly winds except for Grief Bay in the south. Most likely, if a low pressure comes ashore, you will need to wait until it passes and the sea quiets down.

Once you turn toward the east after Blackney Island, paddlers are still not out of the woods from northwest winds and local currents. It is only about 8 nm from Blackney Island but anywhere near to the shore has many islands and islets and not a lot of deep water. Wind from the northwest comes unimpeded over the low ground in the southwest portion of

Calvert and Rivers Inlet, and adds to the problem by drawing that wind to the east later in the day.

Another factor to consider is the huge amount of water that comes out of Rivers Inlet and Fitzhugh Sound on its way out to sea. The result of all this, is that if you are paddling from Blackney Island in the afternoon, in good weather on an ebb tide, the sea state is likely to be quite rough with a lot of echo if you are near to the shore.

There is an inside route closer to the shore once past Chic Chic Bay which might be quieter, or you can move offshore a bit and avoid the echo. The better solution is to leave Blackney early in the morning on a flood tide and it will only take about three hours to be safely inside Grief Bay.

In the case of poor weather with southerly winds, there is little cover along the southern shore of Calvert Island.

In the 2013 survey, we visited almost all of the coves and bays along the west side of Calvert and found most of them suitable for camping and with almost no wind or swell we were able to land without difficulty, except at a couple of large surf beaches. But the conditions that we had are not all that common and higher swell and some wind should be expected.

In this guide, some mention remains of the many places where it is possible to land and camp, but the focus is on places where we think that landing with little or no surf and camping is possible in more challenging conditions. This reduces about 10 or 12 sites down to 5 primary sites that are spread out appropriately evenly and allow for a couple of bail out spots if the sea state turns worse.

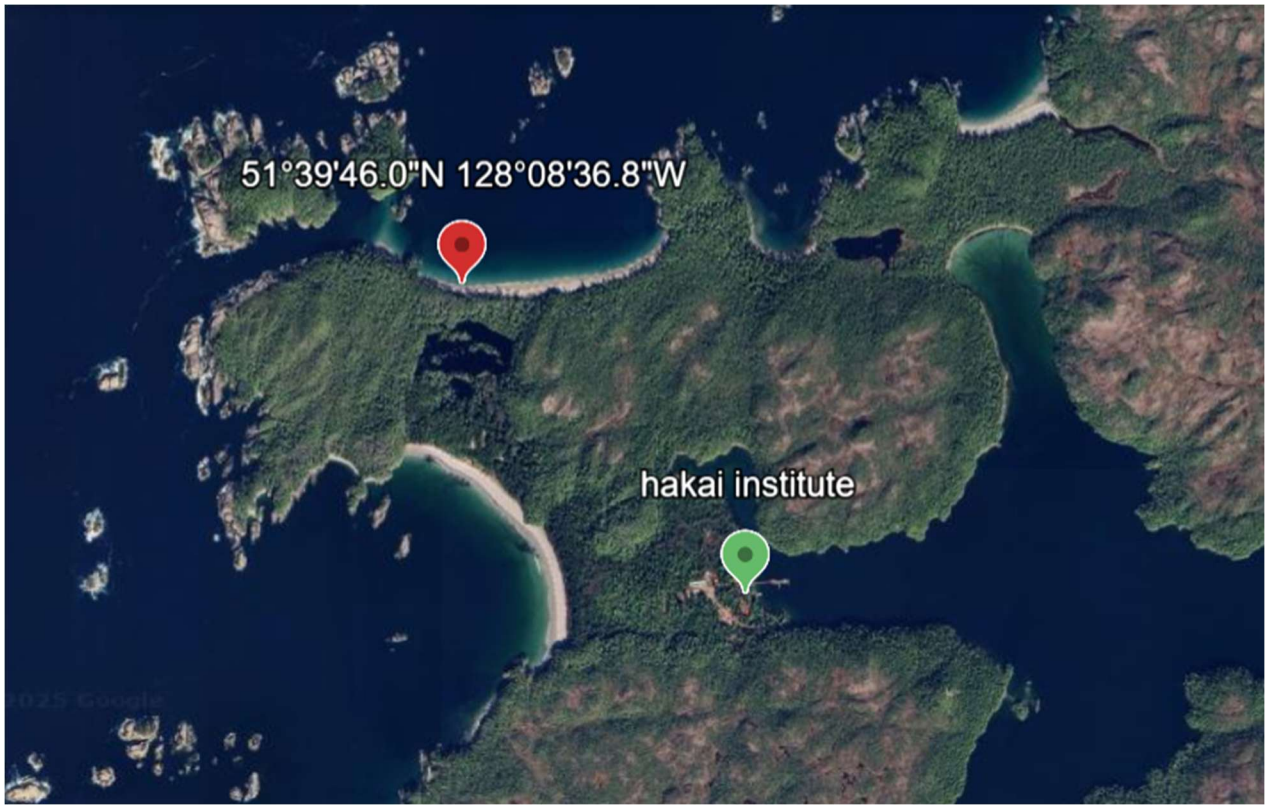
Paddling from North to South, we suggest either starting at North Beach, or a west facing beach approximately 1.5 nm south of the Surf Islands.

27. North Beach

My experience is that the west end of North Beach has a couple of places to land in little or no surf in most conditions.

There is, or was, a trail through to the beach to the south which gives access to the Hakai Institute.

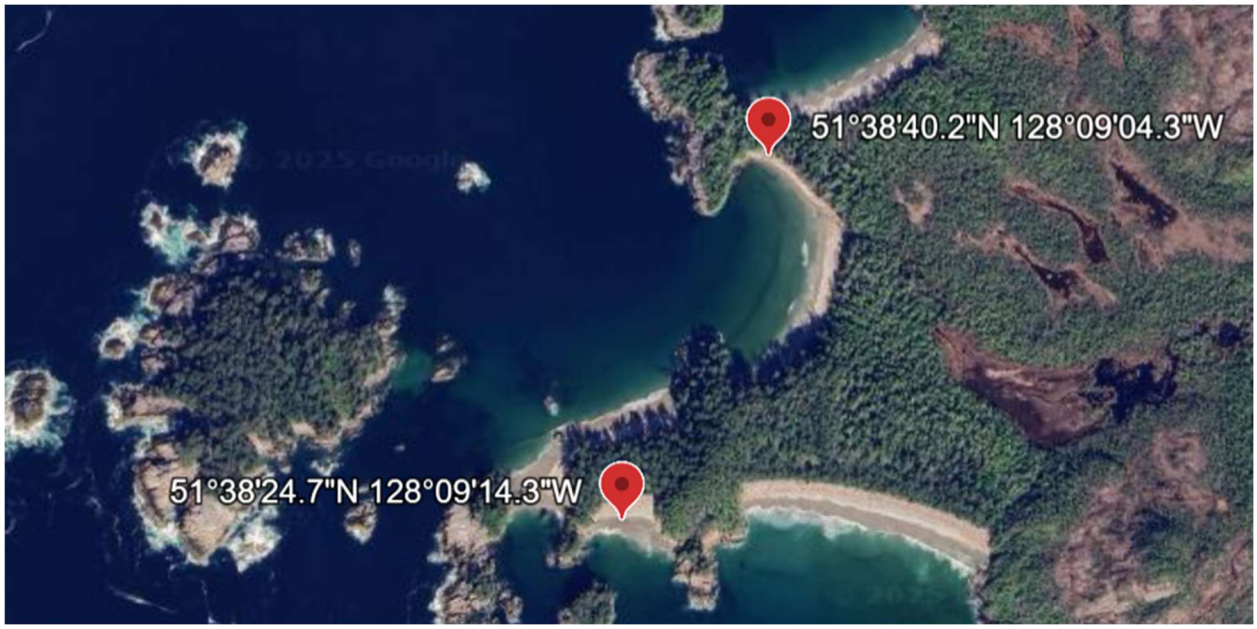
That southern beach often has a lot of surf but landing in the northwest corner will be possible in many conditions.



28. Island 55

The recommended place to camp is a west facing arc beach behind an island marked ‘55’ on the chart. The north corner of this beach is very protected by a point to the west, the various islands and reefs further west and a lot of kelp near the north entrance to the bay.

There is a creek which should have water except in very dry years.



29. Pocket

Another choice is a small pocket about 300 metres south of the south end of the recommended beach in a pocket a little to the west of a larger open south facing beach. This pocket is without much surf or swell at lower tides. At higher tides swell can get in from the west and cause a difficult landing.

There are well used headland trails that join most of these beaches together.

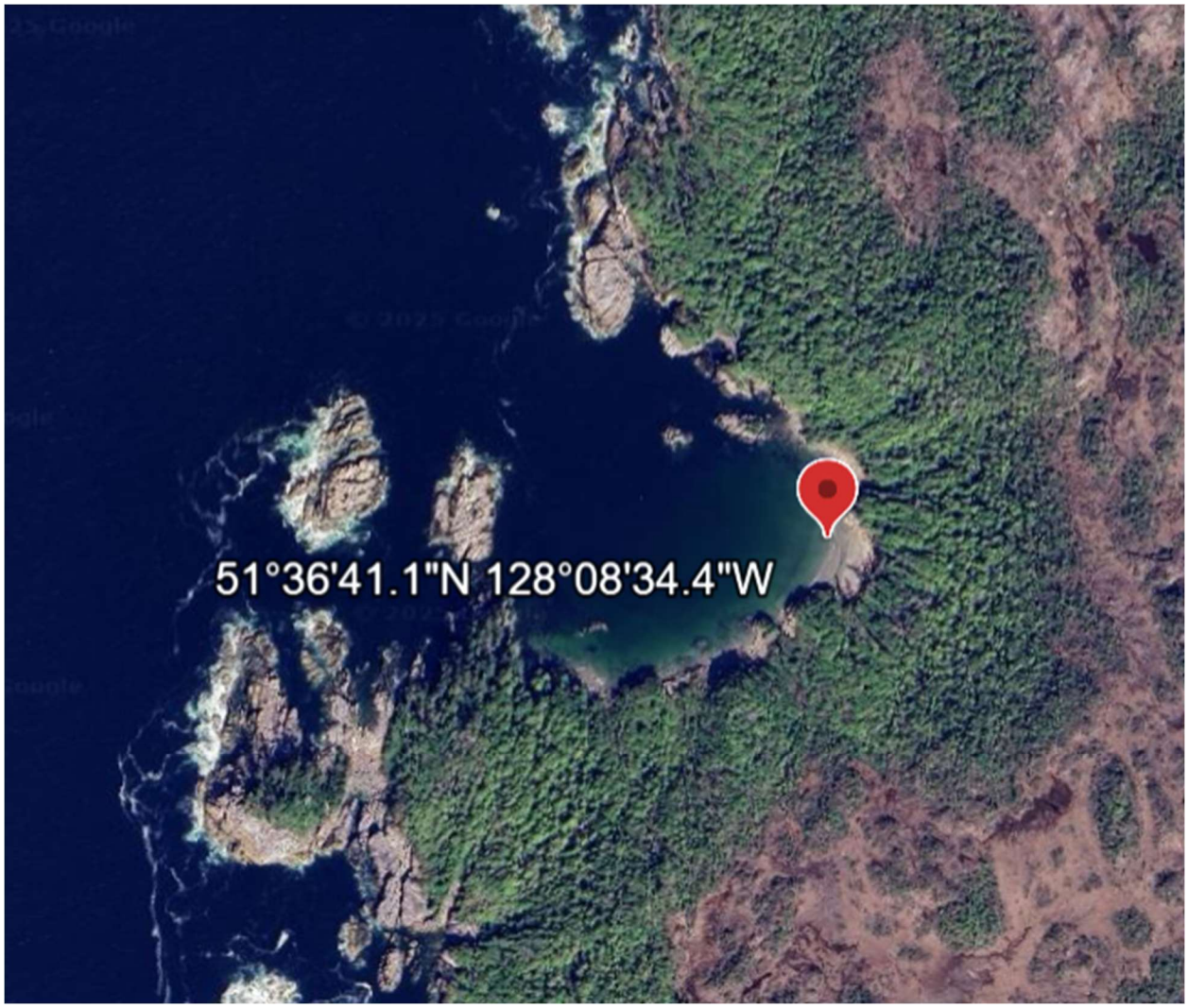
30. Dublin Point

The next primary site is a little less than 0.75 nm north of Dublin Point.

The west facing bay has a narrow entrance that is shallow with a lot of kelp. This protection and the dissipation of energy in the bay as it widens has the effect of reducing most of the offshore energy.

We thought that the beaches in the northern part of the bay were best for camping and in most years there would be water from a small creek.

This place is listed because the next good place to land is behind Blackney Island, about 7 nm to the south. Stop here if you don't want to risk getting caught out in a rising wind.



South of Dublin Point is Three Mile Beach. It is about 1.5 nm long and not obviously three miles from anywhere. About mid-beach is Bolivar Island. We planned to land on this beach and timed our arrival to be in the morning when Bolivar Island was tomboloed to the shore.

On our day, there was very low swell from the northwest, and almost no wind. Our hope that one side of Bolivar would be without surf did not pan out.

If you choose to land on this beach, and the sea state increases, you may be there for a while before being able to launch.

Where else can you experience larceny, mayhem, time travel and have a conversation with a Leviathan all in a 15 hour period?

I had a vacuum sealed pouch of the very best beef jerky I have ever tasted when I set up camp on Calvert Island. All of the rest of my food had been hung but I kept the jerky close in case I was tempted during the night. It went into my net beach bag and was stuffed beneath my drysuit in the vestibule of the tent.

Around midnight I awoke to a rustling sound coming from the vestibule. Donning my headlamp, I dug beneath my drysuit and was horrified to find 8-10 mice scurrying about in the bag. Physically expelling the mice I found holes in the bag and the special jerky defiled and partly eaten.

At dawn I awoke to a pair of ravens glocking and whistling at each other. They sounded very close. Opening my tent door and looking up I was presented with a fat raven, head cocked, looking down at me. I was pleased to see that he was about 5 feet away on a log that I had hung my PFD from. When preparing to launch I was double checking my gear and found the rubber torn and missing from the antennae of my VHF radio. The raven, performing an act of wanton destruction, had eaten it. I could receive but could no longer transmit.

Later that morning I traveled back in time by landing at an archeological site where researchers had found footprints made by a family dating back 13,200 years. Living on a geological hinge during the ice age they had warmed themselves around a fire. What an odd feeling to think of their lives and their world.

Finally, around 2:30PM I was paddling along a steep rocky shoreline. Calm sea state allowed me to travel just a boat length from the rocky cliff. Suddenly a humpback floated to the surface beside me. His/her left pectoral fin was under the boat trapping me next to the rocks. I didn't feel that I could move and wasn't sure what would happen next. He/she was breathing softly and we were eye-to-eye, just looking at each other.

Shocked, but no longer afraid, we sat like that for a while. Eventually I calmed down, took out a meal bar and had a snack. We sat together for about 10 minutes. As I ate I told him/her about my day. How I would be eating beef jerky if not for those damn mice and how I was concerned about not being able to notify Comox Traffic when it was time to cross Queen Charlotte Strait for Port Hardy. That whale was a good listener. It just looked at me and relaxed. After a bit I remembered that I still needed to find some water and a place to camp and told it that I had to get going but I was still pinned next to the rocks. The whale didn't respond until I tapped on the sides of my boat. At that point the whale gently moved off a bit and dove, its tail bidding me adieu.

Where else does all of that happen in a 15 hour period? Only on the BC Coast.

Jon Dawkins

31. Blackney Island

This is an expansive and beautiful spot. Winter storms blowing in from the south ensure much room above all tides.

Landing at the north end of the sand portion of the beach will generally be without any surf. Camping in that corner of the beach is protected from afternoon north westerlies. As one moves further south along the beach it becomes more exposed to the open water.

There is a good creek about 45 minutes walking to the north, and a possible creek about 10 minutes to the south.

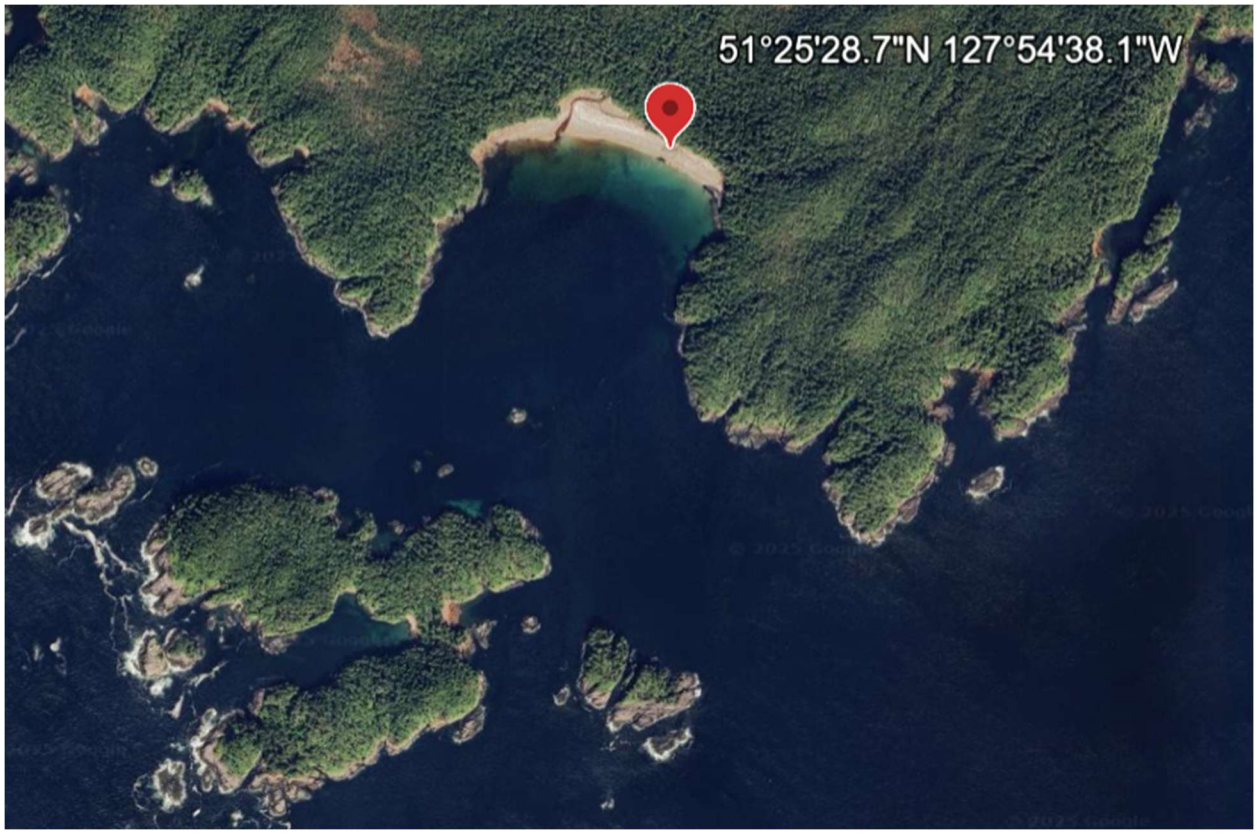
32. Grief Bay

This large sand beach, almost entirely protected by the Sorrow Islands, is a likely stop for everyone, either coming from or going to Cranstown Point.

I have found that camping is good about 100 metres from the east end of the beach.

There is a good creek and there were the remains of a Kayak Bill camp near to the preferred camping spot.

At times, Grief Bay has been noted for bugs, but that is not our experience. A precaution would be to ensure a supply of bug spray and maybe a bug net.



Our experience is that fishing is good all along the west and south sides of Calvert. You are likely to see some sports fishers along the south shore coming from the lodges in Rivers Inlet.

From Grief Bay to Cranstown Point is about 6 nm. An early morning crossing is likely to be calmer.

At some point all of the water and energy that emerges from Rivers Inlet and Fitzhugh Sound on an ebb will meet incoming energy from the open ocean. With higher swell values offshore, it may be prudent to make this crossing at slack or on a flood. I am not sure when the currents in this area change, but my estimate would be about an hour after the tide change.

Cape Caution – Cranstown Point to Bremner Point.

The short stretch of water, less than 20 nm, beginning at Cranstown Point and ending at Slingsby Channel tends to cause some concern among those in transit. The only place I have been on the coast that requires more care is the west side of Moresby Island.

John Kimantas, after a difficult day getting around Neck Ness, suggested just getting through as quickly as possible, in part by staying offshore. My experience is that while there are several challenges, one after the other, with careful planning, a prudent approach and more than the usual amount of patience, the area is manageable for paddlers without the need to endure sea states beyond their comfort zone.

For those who set a paddling schedule and are determined to stay with it, additional hard paddling skills are recommended, particularly skills with disorganized sea states.

The most obvious feature of this area is that it is fully exposed to the open ocean. This means ocean swell that will always be present at some level. The West Sea Otter Buoy about 30 nm west of Cape Caution will give you hourly readings of swell height.

Remember that just because winds have been light along the coast that does not mean that swell, which may originate from weather systems well west of our offshore waters, cannot be disproportionately high.

Another factor is shallow water. The whole of the section covered by this part of the guide has shallow water at least a mile off shore and often more. This, as one would expect, means a lot of reefs that will affect paddling conditions and water moving over shallow water can create turbulence at the surface.

A third factor is the tidal currents running over this shallow water. During ebb tidal currents, huge amounts of water pour southwest out of Rivers Inlet and Fitzhugh Sound before being buttressed by strong outflow currents from Smith Sound. From the east, are equally impressive amounts of water coming out of Queen Charlotte Strait.

These currents meet somewhere around Neck Ness, and the result is predictable. Strong currents colliding over shallow water with offshore swell adding to the energy means rough water. Add some wind and the situation can be troublesome.

Another separate feature affecting paddlers is Smith Sound; this long inlet backs on to the coast range and, in good weather, afternoon inflows have been in the 15-20 knot range when I have been there. Crossing Smith Sound at such times on an ebb will be exciting, at a minimum.

I have spent a lot of time thinking about the transit of this area over five passages trying to reconcile my experience on the water with what might be happening to affect sea state. I have concluded that no matter what precautions are taken, some turbulence will be

encountered around Neck Ness but not so much that paddlers of average ability cannot manage the sea state and the time of exposure can be pared down to half an hour or so.

As one might expect with exposure to the open ocean in an area where the terrain is quite flat, there are many sand beaches that call out to the paddler. This guide lists those that under sea conditions suitable for the average paddler, a landing can be managed without surf. This guide lists the sites I have used both for being nice places and for their place in a quiet overall transit.

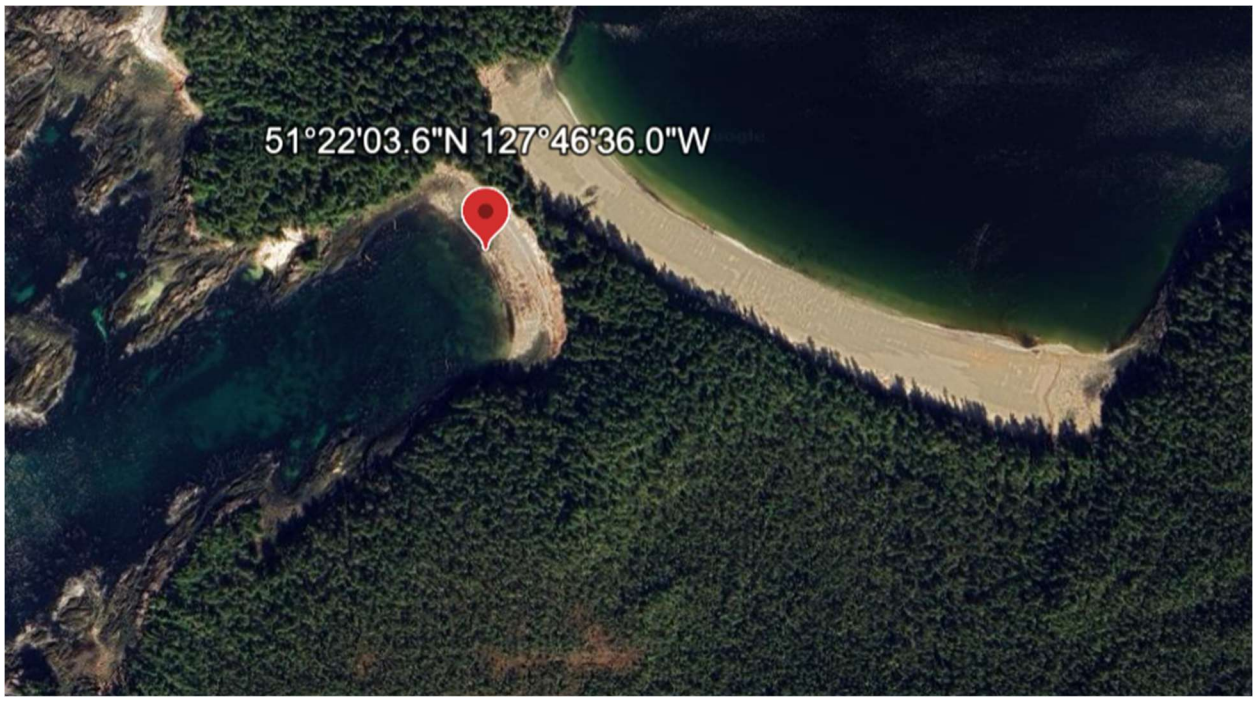
For those crossing from Calvert Island to Cranstown Point, an early start is recommended. Sea state should not be overly affected on an ebb unless offshore swell is quite high and coming from the southwest. This year, coming south from Fury Island on a day with no wind but an ebb, the energy from Fitzhugh Sound meeting that from Rivers Inlet created 3 miles of choppy water. Those going north from Cranstown might find it easier with a flood current.

I think I have been around Cape Caution five times without difficult sea states but always in fog. That is a downside to paddling early in the morning in August.

33. Cranstown Point

The quietest beach to land on faces to the southwest. The potential for surf, given the shape of the cove is negated by large amounts of kelp offshore from the beach. This beach is connected to the large beach to the north by trails.

I have stayed there during large spring tides and found that the south beach retained a couple of spots for camping on sand while they pretty much disappeared on the north side. There is room in the upland for some tents just past the shelter accessed from the south beach. There is a creek at the east end of the north-facing beach.



Cranstown Point to Extended Point is shallow with many rocks and reefs close to shore, but generally without strong currents. A route 300-400 metres from the shore avoids most of the boomers.

34. Extended Point

This site has three small pocket beaches in a southwest-facing cove behind Tie Island. When I have been there a lot of drift logs made landing difficult. The most easterly of these pockets has the remains of a Kayak Bill camp.

Extended Point is where a decision needs to be made about crossing Smith Sound.

For those who have started at Calvert Island or Fury Island, it is likely that in good weather the inflow winds in Smith Sound are either occurring or about to occur.

There are some choices if you choose not to cross because of the inflow wind or the risk of that event. Stay at Extended Point if landing is possible. Cross over to Brown Island where there is a beach on the east side out of the westerly wind. Try to make it to Table Island where camping is possible. Go with the wind into Dsulish Bay, about 3.5 nm which will not take long with a flood current.

35. Dsulish Bay

This site has camping on a large sand beach behind Dsulish Island. There may be some surge on landing, but surf is unlikely.

There is ample beach camping above summer tides and a creek.

On the two occasions I have been there, the sea water at the west end of the beach was quite warm for swimming.

36. Brown Island

This site was not known to me until a meeting in 2025 with some paddlers who had stopped there for the night.

Camping is on sand with room for 2-4 tents above spring tides. Landing is in the southeast corner. At lower tides, landing or launching will be slippery.

This place might save a detour if crossing from north to south when Smith Sounds is too rough.

37. Table Island

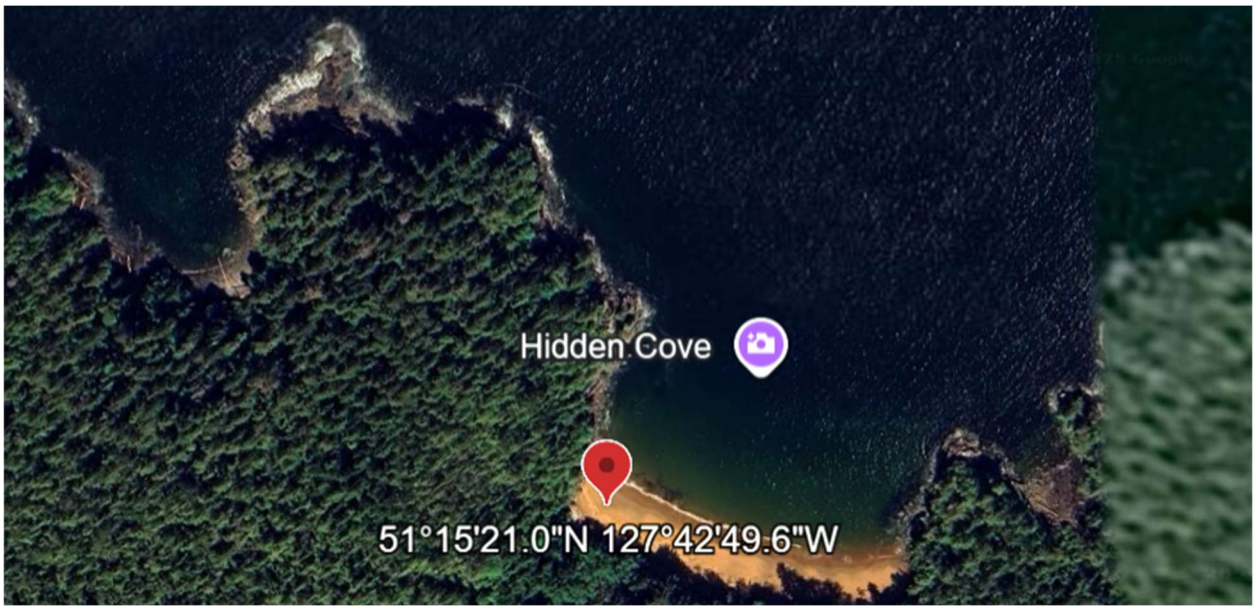
In the channel between Ann Island and Table Island is a north-facing beach that gives access to upland camping. Ann Island is an Indian Reserve.

38. Red Sand Beach

This site is a very popular beach on the south side of Smith Sound which has ample beach camping and several upland sites.

There is a trail at the east end of the beach that accesses a strong flowing creek.

Most of the time, the east end of the beach will have more energy so landing in the west corner is likely to be without surf.



If you are leaving Red Sand in the morning in good weather, an outflow breeze will likely help you along to Milthrop Point. From Milthrop Point it is about 1 nm to the protected beach in Hoop Bay where landing and camping are both possible and pleasant.

39. Hoop Bay

The sand beach in Hoop Bay is about 100 metres long and is very well protected from surf by rocks and kelp at the entrance; the shape of the entrance to Hoop Bay directs most of the offshore energy on the large beach a little to the south.

There is a creek and ample beach camping.

Whether coming from the south or the north, the area around Neck Ness will likely involve choppy water.

Our solution is to make this passage on a flood tide, waiting perhaps an hour or so after the ebb ends, and use the protection of reefs in Hoop Bay to shorten the exposure.

We follow a line SSW out of Hoop Bay staying inside of the boomers that lie on a line between Hoop Reefs and the islet to the north of Neck Ness, cutting out to sea a little before that islet.

This year, 2025, in good weather the chop around Neck Ness was not demanding.

After Neck Ness the first place to easily come ashore is about 0.5 nm further at Indian Cove. Entering Indian Cove is most easily done staying south of the islet that guards the entrance.

The beach is a sand arc about 400 metres in length.

40. Indian Cove

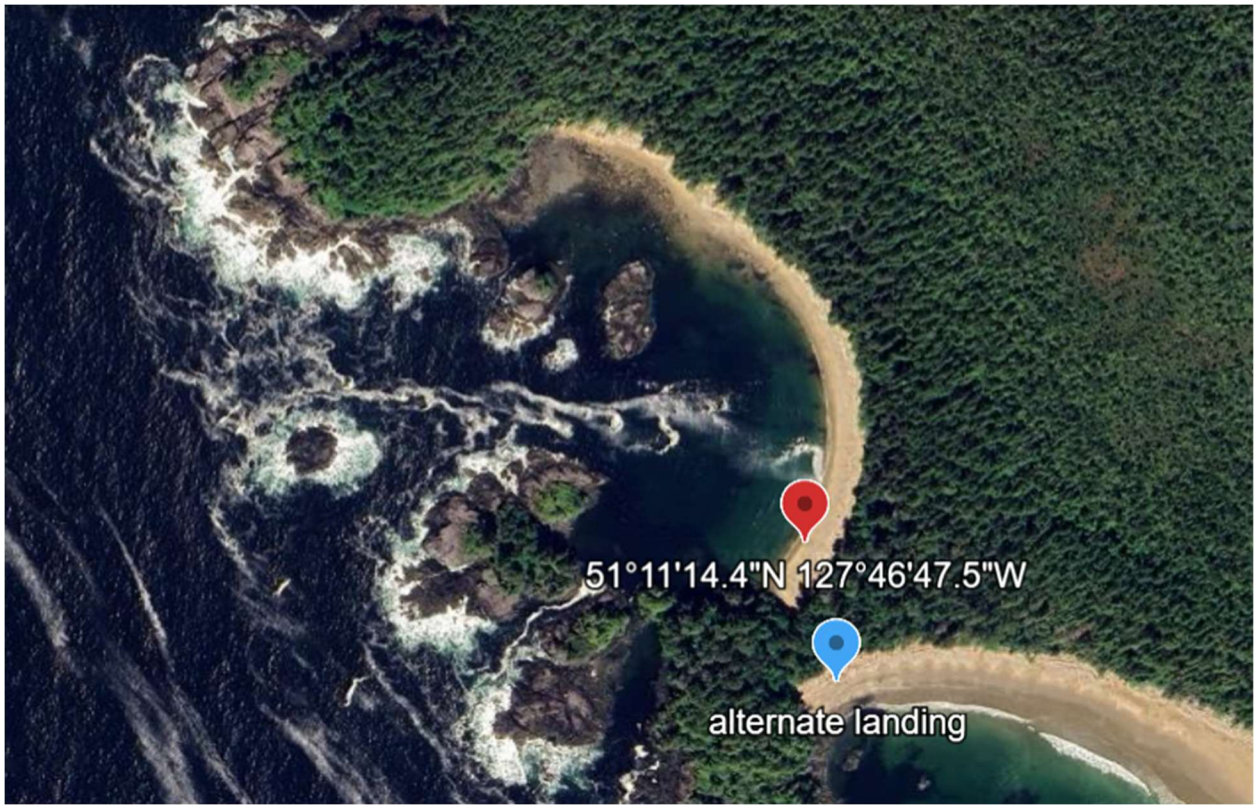
Landing at the south end of the beach is likely to be without surf and little surge; not so much mid-beach.

There is ample beach camping and upland camping for several tents at two spots partway along the beach to the north.

In 2025 there was a sign indicating a trail to the north where water was available. There is a creek in the bay immediately to the north.

Another choice is to land in the northwest corner of Blunden Bay. There is a trail between Blunden Bay and Indian Cove.

There is a 'back door' in and out of Indian Cove at higher tides which is probably easier to find going than arriving.



Never Turn Your Back on the Sea

"Never turn your back on the sea" has been a foundational tenet of ocean safety for ages. Duke Kahanamoku, the Father of Surfing, is credited with first saying it 100 years ago and it has since been passed down through skilled watermen such as Eric Soares of the Tsunami Rangers, and Leo Sommé.

And to me through Body Boat Blade who trained my paddling partner Dave Resler, the guy responsible for much of my paddling knowledge. In spite of some of my practical seamanship education faux pas I always took that saying seriously.

Recently when Dave and I visited the coast we stopped at Indian Cove. Being careful, we wanted to round Cape Caution in the morning before the wind came up so this was an excellent site to camp. The afternoon wind and swell had created moderate texture at the cove entrance prompting Dave to look over his shoulder before entering through the rocks first. I watched the approaching swells then followed a minute or two later.

Once past the turbulence I was able to make out Dave's yellow drysuit near the shore. As I approached, I saw that he was standing in knee-deep water hanging on to the stern toggle of his boat to keep the surge from taking it into the scattered rocks. His other hand was occupied with the business of urinating. Standing there with his relief zipper open and both hands occupied he didn't notice the larger waves approaching.

Dave doesn't swear but when he suddenly experienced a couple of gallons of cold sea water in his drysuit he loudly expressed his displeasure.

All I could say was "Never turn your back on the sea, Dave".

Jon Dawkins

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41. Wilkie Point

The beach at Wilkie Point is in many respects similar to Indian Cove: a north/south sand arc with a protected entrance.

The easiest entrance is through the channel east of the main island guarding the beach. Landing in the south corner of the beach is likely to be easiest.

There is ample beach camping. All of the beaches along this part of the coast get enough heavy weather in the winter that there is usually room above the highest tides in the summer on the beach.

There should be the remains of a Kayak Bill camp along the beach at this site.

42. Burnett Bay

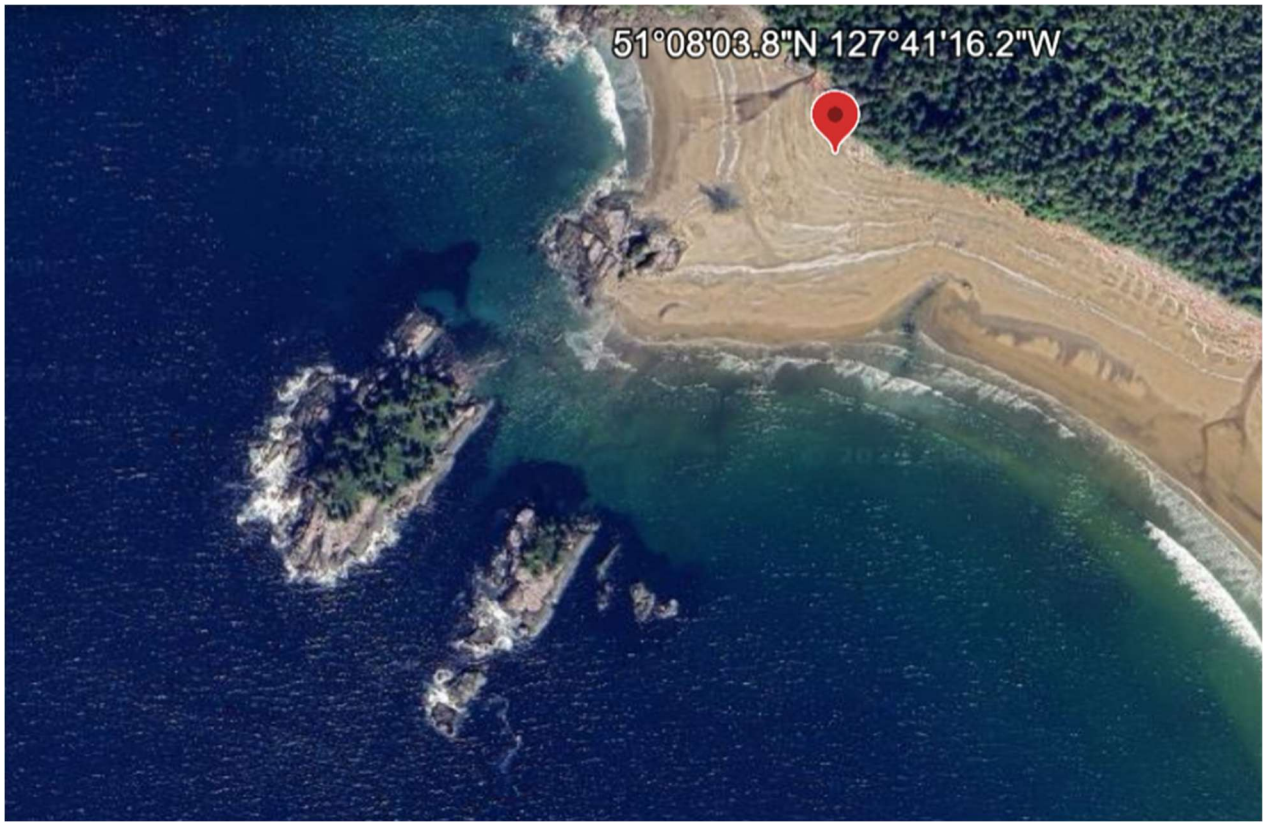
This is a two mile long southwest-facing sand beach that is one of the finest of its kind on the coast. As one would expect in such a place with unimpeded exposure to the open ocean, there is some surf, sometimes very big surf. But there are still places to land without surf.

At the north end of Burnett Bay is a group of three islets, two of which, with a rock in aid, extend from the beach.

At tides below 2.5 metres the larger outer islet is tomboloed to the next one inland creating an area without surf in any but southerly conditions. Enter between the two outer islets from the south onto the beach. At tides between 2.5 and 3.3 metres, the tombolo between the two islets floods but landing is still likely not difficult and the carry up the beach a good deal shorter. At tides above 3.3 metres expect the full energy of swell from the west to break along the shore and any landing will be in surf.

There are two small cabins at this site, one with a stove, and there is room for a tent or two in the upland near the cabins and unlimited room for camping on the beach.

There is a small creek a little to the north of the cabins. We dug a depression in the sand where the creek flows out of the woods and before long a small pool made obtaining water quite easy.



43. Burnett Bay South

At the south end of Burnett Bay there are two options.

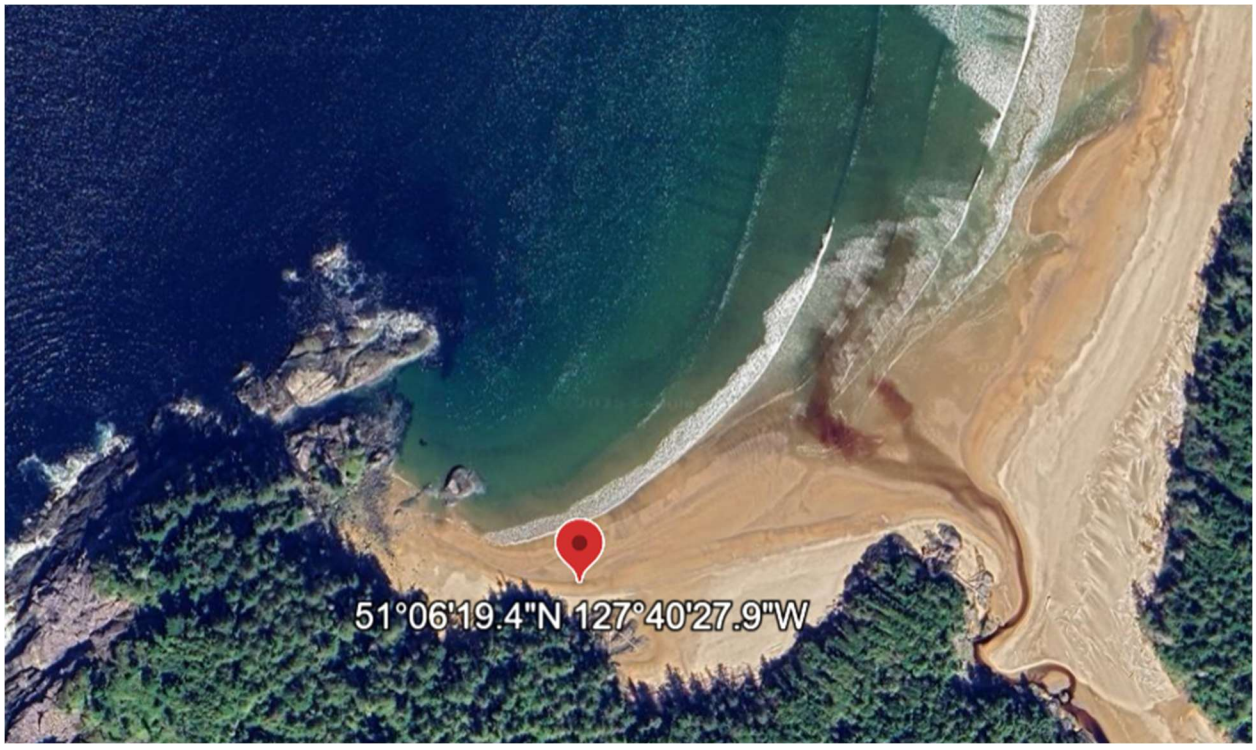
In the southwest corner, protected by some rocks extending to the northeast, is a small pocket beach with room for a couple of tents above high water.

Here, landing will be without surf at times when paddlers are likely to be out. This beach can be accessed at all tides with a short carry.

About 100 metres west of this small beach is a larger beach southwest of the creek. This is the primary campsite for this end of the beach.

Landing may have some surf at higher tides and will entail a fairly long carry at low tides. Access between the two beaches at the south end is only possible at lower tides.

The creek that enters at the south end of Burnett Bay floods with sea water for about one kilometre upstream so if the water is ever not brackish it would be after the area was able to drain. I don't know how far upstream it is necessary to go before good water is attainable.



For those continuing east from Burnett Bay, the first problem is Slingsby Channel. Only those with strong paddling skills will want to challenge crossing the entrance to Slingsby on an ebb. Nakwakto Rapids is a current station, and paddlers may want to leave an hour after the change to flood for the seat state to be calm.

For those going south and crossing via the Storm Islands, the effect of Slingsby Channel extends well to the west of its entrance. This will cause the most unrest after the flood tide starts but before Slingsby turns to flood. In 2025 while crossing to the south we were in that situation of outfow current meeting incoming tide and we had very choppy seas for approximately three miles.

The beautiful beaches between Cranstown Point and Burnett Bay attract not only paddlers but also our furry friends. I have had a brown bear visit at the Hoop Bay site and Jon Dawkins had one visit at Indian Cove. I have seen very large bear prints at Red Sand Beach and on Table Island. The large beach at Burnett Bay seems to attract bears and wolves. Maybe think about bringing some bear spray, an air horn, or other deterrents and be cautious about leaving anything out that will be attractive. When we did the survey in 2013, the wolves at the north end of Burnett Bay had a concerning level of comfort around us. Since then, I haven't experienced that but, like on Campania Island, once animals start to look at paddlers as a food source, a happy outcome is unlikely.

Afterword

I am at a reflective stage in my life and that applies to the relationship that we have with the natural world. Mostly, especially in earlier years I was drawn, I thought, by the meaning that I brought to my paddling adventures. Beautiful sunsets, encounters with wildlife, paddling challenges managed, and being in the company of my paddling mates. This is all well and good, but several years ago I began to think that there is something drawing me to these places that was more subtle. There was an epiphany, of sorts, arising from a lengthy period of eye contact with a wolf standing about 10 feet away at Wilby Point. A feeling that maybe I was part of something.

I believe that throughout the history of human evolution, until quite recently we were part of the natural environment and now we have often become visitors and observers. My view of the world is that humans need to be connected to things and other people to fulfil their basic psychological and emotional needs. That need is baked into what it means to be one of us.

There is ample evidence that being in nature has positive physical and psychological benefits that parallel the benefits of having close relationships with other people.

In recent years I have come to think that if I try to leave the meaning I bring to the wilds aside, I can experience the meaning that the wilds bring to me. I understand that for most people accustomed to living in an urban, organized society, this may not be such an easy process. But for me, it has led to a deeper connection to remote places and a stronger sense that I belong in this world.

GIVE IT A TRY, YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED

Acknowledgements

We decided to do this guide in an attempt to keep the information from the original guides alive and add details of what to expect, gleaned from 15 more years of kayaking experience.

We also wanted to produce a better product that was more useful to prospective paddlers and more attractive to those who just have an interest in the area. None of this would have happened if I had been left to my own devices.

Fortunately, Jon Dawkins and Reale Emond agreed to fill in the many gaps of my expertise and the look of this guide is largely their doing.

I am responsible for the paddling advice, and I only hope that those who want to go to the outer central coast take a risk avoidance approach.

Reale's role was to put together the bits and pieces of narrative that I produced in sometimes a not entirely obvious way. She also reviewed years of photographs and chose those which try to give the sense that having fun is a primary option. Reale also did most of the work with the maps and campsite images.

Pam Hudson, one of the paddlers on the Calvert Island survey, brought her formidable editing skills to help finish the guide. We are grateful for Pam's help in rounding off some of the rough corners.

Jon has acted throughout as a sounding board both for my writing, which is not nearly as good as his, and for the narrative as he has been to all of the places in the guide. His sense of what is of most interest to the paddling community is much better than mine. His advice is throughout the narrative.

Jon also agreed to host the guide for a test run to see if we can get some reaction from those with a history of paddling and those who want to create their own story.

This is truly a joint effort with the single aim of passing along to whomever can use it, the many decades (close to a century between the three of us) of paddling thrills and experience.

Glenn Lewis

Addendum: Site coordinates:

Name	Lat min/sec	Long min/sec	Lat decimal	Long decimal
1.Deadman Inlet	53°37’47.4”N	130°29’09.8”W	53.62983°N	130.48605°W
2.Banks Island North	53°37’50.9”N	130°31’12.1”W	53.63081°N	130.52004°W
3.Larsen Island	53°36’48.7”N	130°33’50.5”W	53.61352°N	130.56402°W
4.Tombolo	53°33’32.8”N	130°32’40.7”W	53.55911°N	130.54463°W
5.Kirkendale Island	53°29’24.2”N	130°25’50.6”W	53.49006°N	130.43072°W
6.Clam Garden	53°26’49.6”N	130°23’34.7”W	53.44711°N	130.39296°W
7.Kelp Point	53°22’59.3”N	130°16’01.2”W	53.38313°N	130.26700°W
8.Wreck Islands	53°20’48.2”N	130°10’06.8”W	53.34671°N	130.16856°W
9.South West Inlet	53°15’06.5”N	130°01’30.1”W	53.25180°N	130.02503°W
10.Terror Point	53°10’04.3”N	129°57’14.1”W	53.16785°N	129.95392°W
11.Calamity Bay	53°10’48.7”N	129°49’54.7”W	53.18018°N	129.95392°W
12.Hickey Island	52°59’54.5”N	129°31’24.0”W	52.99847°N	129.95392°W
13.Oswald Bay	53°01’42.1”N	129°38’12.3”W	53.02836°N	129.63675°W
14.North Rennison Island	52°50’58.0”N	129°20’40.9”W	52.84944°N	129.34468°W
15.North Anderson Island	52°47’19.7”N	129°21’08.2”W	52.78880°N	129.35227°W
16.Kettle Inlet	52°41’43.7”N	129°14’31.0”W	52.69547°N	129.24195°W
17.Clifford Bay	52°35’04.1”N	129°09’17.7”W	52.58446°N	129.15492°W
18.SE Weeteeam Bay	52°29’10.8”N	129°00’30.0”W	52.48633°N	129.00832°W
19.SE Aristazabal Island	52°27’42.6”N	128°58’09.4”W	52.46183°N	128.96927°W
20.Baker Point	52°48’11.8”N	129°12’54.7”W	52.80329°N	129.21519°W
21.Shotbolt Point	52°45’02.8”N	129°08’01.8”W	52.75079°N	129.13382°W
22.Wilby Point	52°33’18.0”N	128°48’30.8”W	52.55501°N	128.80856°W
23.Larkin Point	52°30’35.6”N	128°49’15.6”W	52.50989°N	128.82100°W
24.West Side of Price Island	52°23’15.9”N	128°45’15.9”W	52.38774°N	128.75441°W
25.South Side of Price Island	52°21’31.5”N	128°37’17.0”W	52.35875°N	128.62139°W
26.East Side of Price Island	52°18’58.9”N	128°43’32.8”W	52.31636°N	128.72577°W
27.North Beach	51°39’46.0”N	128°08’36.8”W	51.66279°N	128.14356°W
28.Island ‘55’	51°38’40.2”N	128°09’04.3”W	51.64449°N	128.15120°W
29.Pocket	51°38’24.7”N	128°09’14.3”W	51.64019°N	128.15398°W
30.Dublin Point	51°36’41.1”N	128°08’34.4”W	51.61142°N	128.14290°W
31.Blackney Island	51°30’03.1”N	128°05’34.0”W	51.50086°N	128.09279°W
32.Grief Bay	51°25’28.7”N	127°54’38.1”W	51.42464°N	127.91059°W
33.Cranstown Point	51°22’03.6”N	127°46’36.0”W	51.36766°N	127.77667°W
34.Extended Point	51°19’20.9”N	127°46’50.4”W	51.32247°N	127.78066°W
35.Dsulish Bay	51°20’25.9”N	127°40’37.4”W	51.34052°N	127.67706°W
36.Brown Island	51°18’39.0”N	127°46’13.0”W	51.31083°N	127.77027°W
37.Table Island	51°16’09.8”N	127°48’45.6”W	51.26939°N	127.81266°W
38.Red Sand Beach	51°15’21.0”N	127°42’49.6”W	51.25582°N	127.71377°W
39.Hoop Bay	51°13’10.4”N	127°46’16.3”W	51.21955°N	127.77118°W
40.Indian Cove	51°11’14.4”N	127°46’47.5”W	51.18734°N	127.77986°W
41.Wilkie Point	51°08’23.2”N	127°43’18.8”W	51.13979°N	127.72189°W
42.Burnett Bay	51°08’03.8”N	127°41’16.2”W	51.13439°N	127.68784°W
43.Burnett Bay South	51°06’19.4”N	127°40’27.9”W	51.10540°N	127.67441°W

I was born (a long time ago), raised, and lived most of my life on Vancouver Island.

My connection to this place is strong, where on my mother's side, the family goes back to time immemorial.

I began a transition from hiking to paddling about 35 years ago. As I moved toward my mid-40's, a kayak didn't need to be carried, and the quality and quantity of the liquor improved substantially. After a few years, I bought a Nimbus Telkwa HV kayak and laid a couple of extra layers of glass along the keel. I have camped out of that boat about 1000 nights since, and it is clear that the boat is likely to last longer than me.

About 30 years ago I joined the Nanaimo Paddlers club where I learned my approach to being safe on the coast. At that time, group camping in remote areas was popular, many people were still in canoes and there was less emphasis on hard skills. Groups from that club were inclusive and trips needed to be planned and executed to involve a lot of people who were often well on in years and not skilled in challenging water. I learned that we knew it was time to go home when Molly ran out of scotch. For many years I organized groups of 6-12 people to most areas of the BC outer coast. Someone needed to learn the soft skills to keep folks safe and I enjoyed doing that.

When kayaking changed about 20-25 years ago to the emphasis on hard skills and managing more challenging conditions, that bus left the depot without me.

I have been fortunate to paddle all of the outer coast of BC south of Prince Rupert and Cape Knox and north of Tofino except for about 15 nm on Graham Island. The past 20 years I focused mainly on the central and north coast and the channels and races north of Campbell River. Until the last few years, my trips always included a diverse group. Camping remains my primary focus.

I was able to retire 23 years ago and this left time for paddling and my other pastime, walking Caminos in Spain and France. Retiring to these endeavours was a marked improvement to practicing law which was my vocation.

These days I still plan a three week trip each year although I now limit myself to the central coast. I think that area is the easiest place to paddle with low risk and still be in the wilds. But hope springs eternal, so maybe one more run from Rupert down to Hardy on the outside is still possible.