

## Hail the Columbia III

 [Toronto, Ontario, Canada](#)

Friday, June 20, 2008

### TO VANCOUVER AND BEYOND:

About a year earlier, my brother Peter and his wife Lynn, reported on a one-of-a-kind cruise adventure they had in the Queen Charlotte Strait area on the inside passage waters of British Columbia. Hearing the stories and seeing the pictures with which they came back moved us to hope that a repeat voyage could be organized. And so we found ourselves this day on a WestJet 737 heading for Vancouver. A brief preamble will help set the scene:

In 1966 Peter and Lynn departed the civilization of St. Clair Avenue in Toronto, for the native community of Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island in the Queen Charlotte Strait about 190 miles, as the crow flies, north-west of Vancouver. Peter was a freshly minted minister in the United Church of Canada and an airplane pilot of some experience. The United Church had both a church and a float-equipped airplane in Alert Bay. A perfect match.



**Horseshoe Bay**

The purpose of the airplane was to allow the minister to fly to the something over 150 logging camps and fishing villages that are within a couple hundred miles of Alert Bay and there to do whatever it is that ministers do. This was called Mission Service. At the same time the Anglican Church, seeing no need to get any closer to God than they already were, decided to stay on the surface of the earth and so chugged the same waters in a perky little

ship. In the spirit of ecumenism, sometimes the Anglicans would fly or Peter would chug, depending on weather and other factors. In due time, both Churches abandoned their missionary agendas and the airplane was sold. So too the perky little ship. We don't know what happened to the airplane, but what happened to the ship was terrific.

The ship was called The Columbia III. She was 68 feet long with a 16 foot beam. She had served the Anglican Church as a hospital ship from 1955 until 1968. She was sold off, probably changed hands a few times, was given a full restoration in 1990 and again in 1997. In 2003, the "little ship that could" won first prize in the Northwest Classic Boat show. She has been registered as a passenger-excursion vessel since 1997. You will hear more about this vessel as we go on.

Ross and Fern Campbell bought the boat around 2005 for use in a family "adventure tour" business. They are keenly aware of both the history and the ecology of the region in which Columbia III has sailed and so they put out a feeler to see if those associated with

the mission service era of the boat would be interested in taking one of their eco-adventure tours. Peter bit, assembled a crew of his cronies and the rest, as they say...

Back to the WestJet: Linda and I, accompanied by my sister Susie and her husband David were met at the Vancouver airport by Peter and Lynn. We drove immediately to Horseshoe Bay and boarded the ferry bound for Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. The ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia was a happy primer for our Columbia III adventure, with dramatic, snow capped mountains standing to the east and west like bookends to the gentle swells of the inside passage. Debarking at Nanaimo, we had a short, half-hour drive north along the coast to the town of Parksville, where we had booked a B&B for the night. Dinner that evening was halibut and chips, overlooking the harbour, followed by a stroll along the beach where we were able to put on our best Bruno Gerussi imitation. Although we did spot a running shoe, happily there was no actual foot in it.

 [Parksville, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Saturday, June 21, 2008

## SUNDOWN IN SONORA

Following a very hearty breakfast prepared before our eyes by our host, we set out on the short drive inland to MacMillan Provincial Park, home of the remarkable "Cathedral Grove," a 380 acre stand of old growth coastal forest.

The Grove is bisected by Highway 4, with enormous Douglas firs – one measuring almost 30 feet in circumference - being mainly on the south side. Ancient Western red cedars dominate the north. Tourist exploration of both sides is enabled by an extensive system of well marked and maintained trails and observation decks.

The "Cathedral" name of the park is well earned because it is a spiritual experience to wander among these 800 year old colossuses, some towering 250 feet overhead. As



**Cathedral Grove**

impressive as it is to look up, however, it is at least equally impressive to look down to the moss and fern-covered forest floor which is at once strewn with the death and decay of giants yet teems with new life and second growth.

I have seen, and have been impressed by, the gothic Seville Cathedral in Spain. But while the works of man can inspire a sense of awe, the works of nature, as seen in

Cathedral Grove, inspire a sense of wonder, peace, and humility. And in this

setting at least, we did not have to put up with some guy in a funny hat throwing water and incense around. Of course we didn't meet up with any bears or cougars either.

Leaving the Park we went east, back to the coast, to continue our journey northward. Shortly after noon we stopped for lunch in the town of Courtenay and there met up for the first time with the rest of the party who would be sailing with us. Bob and his wife, Karen and Carl and wife Ann were colleagues of Peter's in the medical communities of Vancouver, Victoria and beyond. We knew immediately that this was going to be a very interesting mix of personalities, experiences and talents... and opinions.



**Cathedral Grove**

From Courtenay it was only another hour or so north to the town of Campbell River, where we were to embark on the Columbia III. We assembled our luggage onto hand carts and trundled them across the docks to where our little ship was docked. And what a pretty little lady she was, too. A white, sturdy looking wood hull trimmed with a bold green gunwale.



**Cathedral Grove**

The trunk cabin was white trimmed in gleaming wood and sparkling metalwork. Nestled along the aft-deck awning were six or more yellow or orange one and two-man sea-going kayaks; an orange rubber zodiac floated at her stern.

As luck would have it, Columbia III was tied up opposite an enormous, modern cruiser which was at least 200 feet long. The ship was variously rumored to belong to Oprah Winfrey or the guy that owns Tim Horton's and was staffed by a crew in white uniform of the he-man variety. It was a very interesting contrast in styles: the beige, bulbous plastic enormity of the modern boat to the no-nonsense, oak, teak and brass sturdiness of Columbia III. Both had their

merits, but I knew which one I would want to take to the prom and I was lading my luggage aboard right now.

Columbia III has six "staterooms" each with an arrangement of either single or double-sized bunks. The lower decks are accessed by ladders, the aft one being through a hatch in the main cabin, the forward one being a more graceful curving, if still steep, stairway. The stateroom Linda and I chose was aft, had stacked bunks and was small enough to require choreography when dressing.

There are three heads aboard ship and they are all "shared." Two of these have hot-water showers.

The main cabin is beautifully finished in lustrous mahogany. It features a large mahogany table that will seat ten in reasonable comfort, and a pair of comfortable sofas along each wall. Just forward is the galley and forward of that the wheelhouse. The whole is heated by a little diesel furnace and becomes a very snug place to which to retire on a crisp or damp evening.

Before shoving off, Captain Ross introduced the ships crew: wife and gourmet chef, Fern, daughter and certified kayak guides Miray and son-in-law Luke. Ross then went through required emergency and safety drill information. He and Luke left us at that point to get the ship under way.

Miray stayed with us to talk about the probable routings that we might take over the next five days. This was to become a routine. At days-end Miray would conduct a de-briefing of the events of the day. She would then lay out the possible itineraries for the next day, explaining the activities and attractions of the various alternatives. We guests would form a consensus about what we thought would be best and Miray would then work out the details with the skipper, taking into account travel times, tides and what-not.

All the while aboard ship a steady stream of goodies flowed from the galley. Fern had studied gourmet cooking and the results were evident at every meal and at every waking moment. There were no hamburgers or French fries on the Columbia III. Everything was fresh, freshly cooked or baked and delicious. One comment in the guest book had a writer declaring the food to be better than he had experienced on the Queen Elizabeth II. We would not argue.

Once out of the harbour the ship turned south to fetch Cape Mudge, the southern tip of Quadra Island. Rounding the Cape we then swung north to sail the relatively narrow channel between Quadra and Read Islands. At places this channel is less than



**Columbia III at dusk on Sonora**

500 yards wide, which would be like the open seas compared to some of the narrows we would shoot later on, but as a first experience it was pretty exciting. We didn't get to see all of it, however, because Fern broke out her first full multi-course meal and we had our heads bowed over the table for a while.

Just around dusk we tied up at a small dock on Sonora Island. This was the Campbell family home base and we would be given a tour of their extraordinary property in the morning. Meanwhile, more snacks, a sip of wine, several hours of tale-telling and general "getting to know you" fun. As we began to suspect over lunch in Courtenay, this was a talented entourage, conversation-wise. We were at least two professional wordsmiths, five or six gifted storey tellers, at least four semi-pro singing voices and a boat-load of



socially, politically and ethically aware and active personalities. There would be no dull moments aboard the Columbia III on this sailing.

 [Cutter's Cove, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Sunday, June 22, 2008

**WE ARE INSPIRED BY CELINE:**

On Sunday morning the coffee pot was on bright and early, soon to be followed by platters of French toast, bacon, assorted fruits and jams and so on. Everyone seemed relaxed and well rested, as a night spent bobbing gently on the sea, seemingly a hundred miles from civilization is wont to do.



**In Johnstone Strait**

Sonora Island is accessible only by boat or sea-plane – or you could try parachuting or swimming, I suppose. In any event, the Campbell homestead is comprised of two multi-storied houses that sit on a steep hillside overlooking a sea channel that might be 250 yards across. A large and efficient-looking workshop sits at waters edge.

The larger, older house is the original residence where Ross and Fern have raised their three children, Miray and a pair of twins - who were off on some sort of a mission while we were there.

The house is spacious, with wonderful airy views all round, is built entirely of wood, was built entirely by the hands of Campbell's and is as spotless, organized and efficient as their little boat. The Campbell children were all home-schooled and evidence of the directions in which their learning journeys took them is evident in the row upon row of books that line the walls of most of the rooms.

There is no electricity on Sonora Island. I was amazed to learn that Ross has run over 8000 feet of plastic pipe up the small mountain that is the island, to a place where it taps into running water and delivers that water to a small generator near the house which charges a nest of batteries. The house is heated by a centrally located wood stove.



**Port McNeill**

Miray and Luke built the other house, again virtually by themselves. It has many architectural delights, not the least of which is a master bedroom that is a loft, reachable

by ladder, which looks out through wall-to-wall windows upon the sea channel below.

Between the two houses is an array of beautiful flower gardens and walking paths. Miray and Luke were married here about a year ago. A vegetable garden is fenced in to keep it beyond reach of indigenous fauna – most of the time

In all, the property spoke of a self-sufficient, resourceful and dedicated family and we felt privileged to have been given a chance to see it. It also gave us full assurance, if any was needed, that we were in very capable hands on this journey.

Ross had timed our departure from Sonora Island to coincide with an easing of a tidal surge through a narrow gap we had to traverse. He would tell me later that there were many such surge points throughout these waters where the speed of the tide outpaced the 8 knot cruising speed of Columbia III. To enter them in that period would be very dangerous and a waste of time because you would just wind up going backward. Not the plan.

In any event we got through the narrows with minimal but amusing bucking and yawing and were out at the intersection of the Discovery Passage and Johnstone Strait, about 20 miles north of Campbell River, and heading north-west. The water here had a sharp, disorganized chop to it that Columbia III danced gracefully over. The sky was almost cloudless and great forested hills, some with little beanies of snow, loomed on all sides. It was exhilarating to stand at the bow with the sea-air whistling through your hair, bald eagles in groups of three or more soaring overhead and the occasional porpoise surfacing to share the fun



**Breakfast aboard the Columbia III**

You could not help but spread your arms and burst into song: *"Every night in my dreams I see you. I feel you. That is how I know you go on."*

We steamed along in this merry fashion for a little over two hours leaving East and West Thurlow and Hardwick Islands to starboard. Every so often we would pass a

lighthouse or other small settlement and a happy exchange of horn-hoots or waves or

a flurry of conversation on the radio would ensue as people recognized the little ship that had been making this journey on a regular basis for the past 50 years.

Eventually we swung north into an inlet close to the mouth of which was the old settlement of Port Neville. A post office was opened here in 1895 and a store and gas station were once featured as well. The post office still lingers today, operated by descendants of Hans Hansen, the original settler, and an artist or two have studios there. Mule deer wander around quite freely and are as tame as puppies. Black and grizzly bears are also common, but less tame. Some of our party went beach-combing while others

visited the museum which is housed in the old store. Luke broke out a unicycle and flitted and fluttered along the dock, scorning the dark waters of a fast-ebbing tide. I tried my hand at jiggling for something or other but only managed to catch a log.

Back out in the Strait we continued on a westerly course for less than ten miles before swinging to the north east at West Cracroft Island. Linda and I had a bit of a thrill just before we made the turn as the cruise ship Coral Princess appeared, heading back to Vancouver following an Alaskan visit. That sighting was fun for us because four years earlier we were on a Caribbean cruise and awoke one morning in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica, to find that the same Coral Princess had docked immediately beside us sometime in the night. The Princess was a much newer, grander and bigger ship than ours and we spent some time casting envious gazes at her balconied cabins, and vast atriums and promenade decks. It was great fun to see her again out here in northern waters.

Our turn eastward now took us toward Call Inlet through narrow, islet dotted channels, at places not 25 yards across. I was amazed to discover Captain Ross in the wheelhouse relaxing on a broad, sofa-like captain's chair, nowhere near the beautiful mahogany and brass ship's wheel. As we discovered back at the family estate, this man defines the term resourceful, and what he had rigged up was a GPS system overlaying navigation charts that were on a laptop computer. He "steered" the ship by twiddling a little dial which projected a spot a given distance ahead of the boat. The distance varied according to the scale he had selected. In open water that spot might be several hundred yards or more ahead of the vessel. In close quarters it would be more like ten or a dozen yards. He would turn the dial so that the projected spot gave him a course which would avoid a particular rock, or whatever, and the ship would simply steer itself to that spot. I was flabbergasted.

Ross twiddled the dial and we took a hard turn to port to head northwest, skirting the north east side of East Cracroft Island, through an even narrower channel. At the end of the channel was Cutter's Cove where we would lie at anchor for the night.

There were three other sailboats in the Cove so evidently it was a popular spot for an over night mooring. It was certainly well protected with less than a mile of open water in any direction; we were anchored about 100 yards off the northern shore.

While preparations for dinner were being made I broke out the light fishing tackle and threw a jig overboard. Two jigs of the rod and I pulled up a small flounder - maybe one-half pound. I threw him back and performed the same routine with the same result. Soon everyone else was having a go and this went on until Fern rang the dinner bell.

After dinner someone broke out some sheet music and we lolled around for a couple of hours singing those tunes. As reported earlier, at least half our number were semi-professional caliber singers and so we gave a good account of ourselves, though I do say so myself. Miray allowed that she played the Irish flute and, if we wished, she would have it unpacked for tomorrow's recital, an idea that was received with enthusiasm.

🇨🇦 [Dusky Cove, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Monday, June 23, 2008

## NOT KAYAKING AT MAMALILLACULLA

After finishing off our boiled eggs, fruit salad and fresh scones we departed Cutter's Cove, heading west through Cleo Channel. I remember having a sense of being over



**Cleo Channel**

whelmed. The sky was a brilliant blue with only a hint of wispy cloud. The water was as flat as a millpond and our little ship was accompanied at various intervals by pods of seals and small schools of Pacific White Sided Dolphins. Bald Eagles gamboled and frolicked overhead like flocks of starlings, reeling, diving, soaring and side-slipping in unending games of air-tag and "watch me Mom!" Looking forward, down the Channel, was like looking down a kaleidoscope tunnel of greens and blues and sun-sparkles. The view down the

tunnel ended in brilliant white snow-capped mountains. Then, turning around, you would see a mirror image fading off behind. It was almost too much.

An hour or so later we swung over to the southern tip of Turnour Island to look at a pictograph on the rock face that appeared to me to be of a three masted sailing vessel. Since George Vancouver sailed these waters on his voyage of 1791 it is fun to speculate that the pictograph commemorates his visit, though I can find no support for that conjecture.

We threaded between Turnour and Harble Down Islands, arriving at Village Island, in the Mahmalillikullah\* Indian Reserve, just in time for lunch. A sailboat was tied up at the small dock so we anchored off about one hundred yards.

It was announced that now was kayaking time in these marvelously sheltered waters. Everyone donned a kayaking vest, which was fitted with a big rubber diaphragm that would be stretched over the opening in the kayak in order to keep water out. First-timers had a bit of a chuckle at the look of these things which resembled a reverse beaver tail that dangled down from the region of one's belly button. Life jackets went over the vests; a quick lesson from Miray and Luke about emergency procedures and everyone into the sea kayaks! Everyone except Karen and me, that is. Karen had some mobility constraints. I had been in a kayak once and got about ten feet from the dock before beating a retreat, having found that the boat and I had very



**The Armada sets forth**



different views on the direction in which we should be travelling. Besides, I sensed there were fish in them thar waters and so I opted for that activity.

A jolly time was had by all as, one by one, the two-man crews were ensconced in these mighty vessels and, rubber diaphragms firmly installed, were given two-bladed paddles and told to shove off. I was impressed at how quickly tentativeness vanished. Within a few minutes folks were charging around with great confidence and soon the armada set off, under the watchful eyes of Miray and Luke, to circumnavigate the island.

I broke out the light tackle rod and was soon reeling up small flounders, rockfish and a couple species of crab, all of which went back into the water. It was as much fun as I could have asked for, though I suspect my passion for the pastime would be held in scorn by the true eco-adventurer.



**Trail to Mahmalilikullah**

Meanwhile, in the kayaks, intrepid adventurers were treated to Miray and Luke's encyclopedic knowledge of the creatures that live below and beside these crystal clear waters. They paddled along the edges of myriad small islets and into bays, looking at anemones, giant starfish, seals and other life, each being given a name and short biography by the guides.

The smiles on their faces were almost as broad as the kayaks as they returned to the mother ship.

No sooner were the paddlers aboard than we all bundled into the zodiac and headed for the dock. There is an ancient native village on this island – hence the English name. The village is now abandoned but is thought to be anywhere between 6000 to 10,000 years old. We set off through the heavy bush to have a look.

Here we were introduced to the phenomenon of “middens” which are, essentially scrap heaps. In west coast form, they consist primarily of the shells of mollusks which were a diet staple of the costal people. Apparently they would consume the meat and then just chuck the shells out along the shoreline where, over the passage of centuries, they accumulated into hills that can be a mile long and as much as thirty feet high. Middens throughout the world are an archeologist's gold mine because they present a detailed record of the diet, lifestyle, culture, tool usage and so on of long-forgotten peoples.



**Mahmalilikullah**

The trail to the village left the forest and proceeded through a heavily overgrown meadow-like tract, festooned with wild flowers of many colours. The sea-channel was to our right although the midden blocked our view of it from time to time.

Eventually we came upon the ruins of the village; the only thing standing was a rectangular structure made of huge logs which may have been the entrance to a long house. Further down the trail we saw what remained of an old totem pole that had fallen down many years before. The image of a bear could still be discerned on the totem. We were told that the tradition of the native people is to allow totems such as this to return to the soil.

We returned to the dock by way of the beach and enjoyed finding pieces of colored glass, china and other trinkets. Our mad Irishman decided now would be a good time for a swim and earned our great respect for being able to endure these frigid waters, however briefly.

Back on Columbia III we motored west and north a distance of about 7 miles, arriving at Dusky Cove off Bonwick Island, where we would anchor for the night. While most of us fished, Fern was busy preparing a *tour de force* of Coho salmon, baked potatoes, salads and desserts. The fishing in the cove was actually quite good and I caught a very handsome Rainbow flounder of about 4 pounds and a handful of other, less colourful flounders of maybe a pound or so each. We destined these for the breakfast table the following morning.



We are amused

After dinner we had another sing along, only this time with Miray on the Irish flute, Fern on the fiddle and Luke on the banjo. Lively Irish jigs were the main entrée. It was terrific!

 [Sunday Harbour, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

WE MET A LEGEND AND I CATCH A FISH:

In our briefing session for today's activities we were given, as usual, several possibilities. The chance to meet Billy Proctor, a very well known pioneer who had spent his life in the Broughton Archipelago region, sounded too interesting to miss.

Before that, however, another kayak outing was in order. This time, having had a nice breakfast of flounder, I went along with the party. A sea-kayak is actually quite a stable vessel and, with a foot-operated rudder, will essentially take you in the direction you had

a mind to go. We paddled around the islets at the mouth of the cove and saw many of the wonders there were to see. At one point, while out in open water, we were in the midst of a pod of whales and, although we didn't see any, could hear great "whooshes" as they surfaced and breathed. It was very jolly. Bald eagles continued to do their thing.



**Fish lures in the museum**

We departed Dusky Cove and swung around the top of Bonwick Island heading north-east to Echo Bay on Gilford Island. Enroute we learned that Billy Proctor had been born in Port Neville in 1913 and had forged a living in various sea and forest-

related occupations over the years. It was said that he knew every cove, inlet and stream in the Peninsula. In latter years he became curious as to why the salmon populations, which used those streams for reproduction, were becoming seriously depleted. He gained an international reputation for his work in exploring salmon streams and documenting the kind of environmental damage he discovered that was making those waterways inhospitable to salmon egg-laying.

The CBC includes Billy Proctor in its 2007 list of "Seven Wonders of Canada". Journalist David Savage describes him as "fisherman, logger, builder, mechanic, conservationist, salmon hatcher and museum curator" and goes on to describe Billy's museum as a tribute to the perseverance of humanity.

Mr. Proctor came down to meet us at the dock as we came in. He was a quiet, unassuming gentleman with a decided twinkle in his eye. He was happy to chat on any subject and was delighted to show us his museum, which is an astonishing collection of everything imaginable that might constitute life in this part of the world.



**Billy Proctor at his fish pond**

One entire wall is virtually covered with fishing lures.

Adjacent to the museum is a huge boat-house of unusual design – which included no central supporting posts for the enormous roof that had distinct sideways lean. Billy and his daughter had built it by hand. David asked Billy why he had chosen that particular architecture. Billy looked over his glasses and a knowing smile flickered on his lips as he replied "Oh, it just seemed to be a good idea at the time." Turned out he was looking for a design with no central pillars that would interfere with building a large boat. When someone built such a structure, at about one-tenth the scale, over at Echo Bay, Billy



thought it was just what he was looking for. He took the plan, multiplied every dimension by 10 and set out to saw up the logs to build it. Unfortunately the pressures of snow, ice, wind and rain were also increased by an order of magnitude and the building was about to collapse.

We left Billy Proctor and walked across the broad finger of land that separates his property from the community of Echo Bay. The trail wandered through magnificent coastal forest and ended at the Echo Bay Elementary school – which was in the process of being permanently closed down, the townspeople having moved away.



**Through the woods to Echo Bay**

A high-end fishing lodge near the mouth of Echo Bay is the only economic activity in the area now. A midden of about eight feet in height separates the forest from the beach.

Continuing with the missing salmon theme, Miray had arranged for us to visit the Salmon Coast Field Station, a salmon research post run by Alexandra Morton, which was just across the bay from Billy's. Alexandra is a self-trained biologist who started out doing whale research. She became interested in the problem of declining salmon populations and began orienting her studies to that question. She and Billy Proctor have become good friends and have collaborated on a book titled *Heart of the Raincoast*. Ms. Morton's thesis is that fish farming creates clouds of sea lice which attach to salmon fingerlings as they try to make their way to the open sea. The lice don't kill the fry directly but sap them of energy so they don't grow and are thus eaten with ease by other sea predators. Needless to say Ms. Morton is not popular with the (Norwegian) fish farming corporations nor with government agencies that earn revenue from fish farm licensing and whatever. We were very impressed with her and with the facility she operates.

Our anchorage for this night was to be in Sunday Harbour, just a few miles north of Dusky Cove where we had been last night.

We arrived there in the late afternoon and, while Ross and Luke put out a crab trap, baited with the remains of yesterday's catch, and Fern and Miray pulled dinner together, I decided to wet a line.



**Just for the halibut**

I was using light tackle, an old reel in which the drag didn't work properly, a rod with a tip that had broken off earlier and carrying 10 or 12 pound test line. I threw the jig out, let it settle and then began reeling it back in, without success. The lure appeared to have caught bottom. I gave the line a



mighty heave in hopes of breaking the lure free and all of a sudden the “bottom” began heading in the general direction of Japan.

I have caught some big fish in the past but had never felt anything like this on the end of a line before. It was not the frantic rush of a Small Mouth Bass or the “head for the bottom and wrap around a log” of a large Northern. This was just something big that was heading out to sea right now. I adjusted the drag as best I could to put pressure on whatever it was - I thought at one point it was a seal - and held on. About 200 yards of line just kept being stripped off the reel. Finally, when I could see the bottom of the spool, the thing suspended its exodus. I gently began retrieving line, inch by inch, pulling the beast back toward me and taking up the slack. I retrieved maybe 20 yards this way before the creature decided it had had enough and set out to the west again. This was repeated five or six times, but with each I was making more and more progress in bringing the thing to the boat.

Finally, after an hour or so I knew the line was more or less up and down, meaning the fish, or whatever, was directly beneath the boat. I began to slowly winch him in. Eventually we could begin to make out a shape. It was large halibut. Unfortunately, he began to make out our shape too and decided to make a run for it. So the process of dragging him back to the boat began all over again.

Once we realized what we had on the line the question became what to do with it? It was over four feet long and weighed over 50 pounds. Columbia III did not carry a net or a gaff or a firearm. I told the skipper that I was okay with cutting the line and letting the fish go. The hunt was on, however, and that suggestion was dismissed. Ross and Luke got back into the zodiac and Ross fashioned a noose, which went around my line, out of some stout nylon rope. The next time I got the fish to the surface, Ross leapt onto the fantail of the boat, passed the noose over the fish’s head and maneuvered it to the tail, whereupon he heaved on the rope and tightened the noose. He then sped up the ladder to the main deck of the boat and hauled the fish aboard, tail first.

This was a very unhappy fish. He leapt about the aft deck, mighty flukes strewing deck chairs, kayak paddles and anything else that wasn’t tied down like so much wheat chaff. It was a modestly dangerous situation but Ross did have a kosh aboard and soon had the fish quieted down. Since we were now quite late for dinner Ross insisted that we go and dine on the excellent repast that Fern was trying to keep warm.

While we were eating Ross filleted the halibut into four huge slabs of meat, each the size of a rack of ribs only three times as thick, and broke out the sea-water hose to clean up the deck. I was something of a pariah, I fear, especially among the distaff members of the crew, this being an eco-adventure and all and here I was killing the fishes. In addition, the Campbell’s kept their little boat in pristine condition and, I was informed, there was nothing worse than halibut slime for being tracked in off the deck and onto the luxurious mahogany floors of the cabin. The halibut steaks the next night were delicious, however, and everybody went home with five or six pounds in their coolers. I hear Ross took to hiding the fishing apparatus on future voyages.

That evening in Sunday Harbour we guests exercised a considerable talent for story and joke telling and discussion of trivia. I was kept busy both preening and trying to avoid Fern's direct gaze.

 [Dong Chong Bay, British Columbia, Canada](#)

Wednesday, June 25, 2008

#### A FEAST TO REMEMBER:

After breakfast some of us went kayaking – Peter and I in a two-man boat and David and Luke in singles. We puttered around through the kelp and sea-weed, Luke drawing our attention to the various life forms that find shelter in those beds. At one point we quietly stole around the tip of Eden Island so as not to disturb a colony of sea lions that was basking and barking on an islet near by. While we were kayaking Ross took the others on a cruise around the island, so they had a chance to see the sea lions, too.

When we rejoined Columbia III, Ross reported that his crab trap had caught five or six large Dungeness crabs and a couple of rock crabs. A feast was about to be laid on!

We motored up to Insect Island where there was a broad, stony beach. Our hosts ferried us ashore in the zodiac and suggested we start rustling up some firewood.



**Kayakers collide**

Meanwhile the zodiac returned to the ship and started ferrying Fern to shore with baskets of food. Luke soon had a fire going and a salt-water pot was set to boil.

While Miray and Fern set out platters of baked goods, fresh fruit and vegetables, Luke put the crabs on to cook. The result was one of the finest meals I have ever eaten. I wondered, silently, if grizzly bears like to eat crab?

Sadly, we now had less than 24 hours left in our adventure. Once clear of Arrow Pass we headed south south-west across the open waters of the Queen Charlotte Strait, toward Hanson Island where we would overnight. As we traveled along we sighted several Fin whales and I was lucky enough to photograph one breaching. Seals boogied about here and there so I guessed there were no Orcas in the vicinity. Dolphins swam alongside or surfed on our bow-wave. It was magic.

We anchored in Dong Chong Bay, named after a Chinese grocer who served the Alert Bay area beginning in 1928. The Chong family still runs retail operations out of Port Hardy today. While Fern prepared our delicious supper of fresh-caught halibut, Miray and the women-folk recorded the steps of our five day journey on maps, without which this account could not have been written.

Meanwhile, Ross finally had an opportunity to show the men-folk the engine room of his ship. The room was not only spotless, it gleamed. The original Gardner diesel engine, installed in 1956, still powers the boat. Its stainless steel manifolds and valve covers suggesting the tender loving care it receives, for which it returns unfailing service.

🇨🇦 [Port McNeill](#), [British Columbia](#), [Canada](#)

Thursday, June 26, 2008

#### THE PARTY'S OVER:

From Hanson Island it was a short run of an hour or so to Alert Bay. This was a nostalgic visit for several of us. Peter and Lynn had been stationed there for several years and Linda and I had visited them there as part of a belated honeymoon in 1968. The town is the kind of place where nothing much happens but when it does it is unusual. Lynn once met John Wayne while he was strolling the streets and she was pushing a baby carriage.

Peter's United Church is now a back-packers lodge and the small house they lived in appears to be abandoned.

A short walk to the other side of town took us to the site of St Michael's Residential School, the like of which inspires so much odium with native people across the nation. It is derelict now and will certainly not be the object of loving care any time soon.



**Totems at Alert Bay**

It is a puzzle why they don't tear the place down and plant some trees or something.

Adjacent to the school is the U'Mista Cultural Centre which was created to preserve elements of native cultural history. It is very well done and features stories and depictions of potlatches and masks and totems that were part of the life of the region. Many of these artifacts had been simply stripped from native hands

years ago and sent to museums in North America and beyond. Since its establishment in 1980, the U'Mista Cultural Society has been lobbying for return of those artifacts, with some success.

And with this our amazing eco-adventure was over. We spent most of the time of the 6 mile jaunt over to Port McNeill finalizing the packing of our bags and getting them up onto the after deck ready for off-lading. It had been an extraordinary five days by any measure: the food, the scenery, the adventure, the history, the personalities and the hospitality were all exceptional. And I caught one damn fine fish.