

Sea Kayaker's

# Open Water



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## THE MERITS OF A MOTHERSHIP

BY MICHAEL COLLINS, PUBLISHER OF *SEA KAYAKER* MAGAZINE

For 30 plus years we've used sea kayaks as a means of exploring the coastal regions of the Northwest and beyond. Doing the trip planning and being off the grid and completely self-reliant has been one of the big draws to kayak touring for us.

The thought of giving up command of our vacation had kept us from investigating the option of joining a tour or taking a cruise. Last summer our reluctance to take a guided trip vanished when we had the opportunity to join Mothership Adventures for a week of sea kayaking in the Great Bear Rainforest on the central coast of British Columbia, Canada.



The Columbia III of Mothership Adventures

We were met by low gray clouds and rain as our plane landed in Bella Bella to meet the Columbia III. A quick taxi ride brought us to the town wharf where we were greeted by her crew of four: Captain Ross Campbell, kayak tour guides Steve and Luke (who also filled in as assistant cook, waiter and tutor) and Fern, our cook extraordinaire, who is also a licensed guide and captain.

We were shown to our cabins to stow gear and soon after were seated in the main cabin for a safety talk by our tour leaders. In the mean time the Columbia III had cast off and we were underway, leaving civilization behind. Unlike arriving at a kayak put-in when it's raining, our gear was still completely dry and we had a warm dry location to meet our new paddling partners as we watched the scen-



to find appetizers on the table and word that the route to our anchorage would take us past one of the few First Nation's petroglyphs (rock carvings) in the area, with the opportunity for a quick photo stop going ashore via the large inflatable dingy.

We finished the day with a wonderful home cooked meal (assuming your mom was a great cook) complete with wine and fresh-from-the-oven dessert. After dinner Luke and Steve joined us, chart in hand, to discuss the next day's paddle. The weather was pretty unsettled so we were heading to an area that would offer protection, beautiful scenery, waterfalls, First Nations Pictographs (rock paintings) and the potential for wildlife sightings.

Morning brought rain and low clouds, which accentuated the height of the mountains dropping straight into the waters of Roscoe Inlet. Once in our boats and paddling our Mothership started down the inlet to be waiting for us at the end of the day. As we paddled the now deserted inlet we passed pictographs, waterfalls and beautiful scenery, that soon became the norm. Our lunch stop at the estuary for Quartcha Creek allowed us a flat place to get out and stretch our legs. We kept our eyes peeled for bears. Luke and Steve brought one of the doubles up and turned it over to create a table they spread with a hearty lunch, complete with salad and dessert.

At the end of our day's paddle we arrived at the Columbia III. As we closed the distance we noticed Ross out in the inflatable dinghy pulling crab pots. Once underway we were treated to fresh crab as we headed for our next anchorage.



The Mothership Adventures staff layed out this scrumptious spread for lunch

ery slide by. We had dry cabins to get dressed in and a covered aft deck to get our gear organized. Our kayaks that had been lowered from the cradles on the upper deck, by the crew.

We climbed into our kayaks and our first paddle was through very protected waters of Troup Passage and across Return Channel, giving us time to get adjusted to our kayaks and paddling partners. Once we rounded the first point, the Columbia III was out of sight leaving us on oily smooth water marred only by the circles created by the falling rain. As we worked our way through the channel we quickly came to appreciate the depth of knowledge our guides had of the environment we were paddling as they pointed out man's influence and talked about the wildlife of the area. At the end of the afternoon's paddle we were met by our the Columbia III, waiting quietly for us, having taken a route that kept her out of our sight. Back aboard we were instructed to leave our wet gear on the aft deck and the crew would hang it to dry while we went below to our cabins to change. In the meantime our Mothership was on her way to the next day's put-in.

Dried off and changed, we returned to the main saloon



These petroglyphs, or rock carvings, are some of the few that remain from First Nation.

Weather was looking up but still not settled by our third day, and the decision was made to head closer to Queen Charlotte Sound but stay in sheltered waters exploring the shallow waters of Louise Channel running between Stryker and Potts Islands. Later in the day when

the sun finally came out our group rafted up in a kelp bed for a snack and water break. Out came a knife and soon we had the traditional kelp horns, that several proved to be quite musical with. Then came kelp jewelry: rings for



Making music with kelp horns.

fingers, ears and noses, and finally kelp carving, netting us mythical to semi-real sea creatures. Day four brought the sun, as a result of a high-pressure system that gave us the predictable winds our guides had been hoping for, allowing us to explore the windswept and ocean-washed rocks and white sand beaches of the outer coast. With an early July minus tide we explored the inter-tidal rocks and steep island walls. As we rounded the north end of Goose Island we felt the ocean swells, accompanied by the reflecting waves from the rocky shore.

Having spent the first 3 days on flat water it took some of us a bit of time to become completely comfortable in 6-foot swells. Paddling down the coast there was abundant bird life, seals and the occasional otter accompanying rocks and cliffs beautifully sculptured by the ocean. For our lunch break we landed on a white sand beach.



Paddling the rougher waters on the north end of Goose Island.

The only tracks in the sand were those of a wolf pack. After lunch feast a net float we'd found served as a ball we soon were playing baseball using sturdy driftwood bats. We spent the remainder of the day paddling the west coast of Goose Island and exploring the more gentle ocean surges between rocks. With the high-pressure system still in place the next two days were also spent exploring the outer coast and getting more comfortable in the swell.

Having to make a noon flight out of Bella Bella we thought there would be no time for a paddle on our last day. Our guides surprised us with an early morning before-breakfast paddle. The morning's route took us through a network of small channels. Being on the water as the sun came up then returning to the aromas of hot coffee and breakfast was a great way to end the trip.

Would we do it again? In a heartbeat. The ability to select an area appropriate for the weather at hand, the wonderful food and accommodations topped off by a knowledgeable crew that quickly seemed like old friends made this the getaway we didn't know we were looking for, with luxury we don't usually allow ourselves. **SK**



Paddling back to the Columbia III on our last day, fulfilled by a journey we won't soon forget.

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