

Desolation Sound...

Where Family & Friends Make Memories

By Robert Huston



The distance from Seattle Washington to Desolation Sound British Columbia prevents us from being able to travel there as often as we would like.



We made our first trip there in 1991 on a 36' Chris-Craft we spent a month on the boat exploring this enchanted area for the first time. We were able to go again in 1999 on our 46' Alaskan and connected with three other families on their own boats and we cruised together for three weeks. We explored new areas and re-visited our favorites from our previous trip. For this trip I had been planning and preparing for two years to have the boat and the systems ready. Our boat named "Lady Karla" was built in 1971 by American Marine, the builders of the popular Grand Banks trawlers. We have owned the Lady Karla for 11 years and have maintained and upgraded her as we have had the opportunity to over the years. The Alaskan is a pilothouse vessel with twin 120 hp Ford Layman engines and a 7.5 kW Onan Generator. This vessel is very comfortable for our family of four. We have a Master Suite forward with a private head and our two daughters Elizabeth (17) and Emily (13) share the other stateroom and the amidships head. The Salon and galley are where we do our living and the Pilothouse gives us an excellent divided space to carry on the work of piloting the vessel.

The Crew

On this trip North our good friends from West Seattle the Nelsons will be joining us, Alan, Joke, Peter (17) and Laura (15). The Nelsons boat the "Noordwjick" a Southbay 38' it is a Sportfisher model built on the East Coast. We had cruised together on several other shorter trips and found that we really enjoyed each other's company and our children had a great time together. Our plan was to cruise together through the San Juan's and the Canadian Gulf Islands and then on North to the Desolation Sound area. On July 28th we

depart from our Lake Union boathouse and transit the Harem Chittieton Locks



from the Lake level down to the level of Puget Sound . The weather was calm and clear and we were underway heading North to the Islands of northern Puget Sound . As we travel I get to test for the first time in open water the new Autopilot and Radar that I had recently installed. The crew all settle in to nap or read and I check the engine room and set up our

waypoints on the Nobeltec charting software I running on the laptop computer in the Pilothouse. We were making good time traveling North with the ebb tide and passed the South end of Whidbey Island doing 10 knots. We planned to travel up the East side of Whidbey Island past the towns of Langley and Oak Harbor both cruising destinations when we are not traveling to distant harbors. After we passed the North end of Camino Island we turned East in to the Swinomish Slew. This well marked natural channel passes between the mainland and Fidalgo Island and leads to one of our favorite stops at LaConner. This artsy little town has two large marinas that have considerable visitor moorage. We found a slip at the South Marina near town and got tied down and plugged in to shorepower for the night.

In the morning we said goodbye to LaConner and headed north to Saddle Bag Island a small State Park just north of the exit of the Swinomish Slew and East of Anacortes the small town on the north end of Fidalgo Island that calls itself the gateway to the San Juan's. We anchored in 30' of water and took the 17' Whaler out to set a crab pot. This area is popular for crabbing do to the extensive areas of shallow water from the Skagit River delta. We had lunch and took a walk on Saddle Bag Island with our boating Beagle Glorie before we pulled up our empty crab pot. We pulled the anchor and headed East through Guimes Channel and across Rossiero Strait to Friday Harbor .



When we got to Friday Harbor we anchored in the South end of the bay to stay away from the ferry wakes and the boat traffic to the large Marina . After we settled in we took the Whaler to the marina and took a walk through town. A fire early in the summer destroyed the store and several small shops. As you would expect this small Island town pulled together

and found space for all of the displaced business within the hart of this busy little town. A walk through this town leaves you with the feeling that you can find almost anything you need or want if you spend some time looking and talking to the towns people and shop owners. When we got back to the boat the wind had come up to about 15 knots, we were moving around a bit as the wind changed direction but the anchor was holding fine. When we cruise on the Lady Karla we anchor most of the time I like the privacy it affords us and I have a great deal of confidence in our ground tackle. We use a 60 pound Bruce anchor with 5/16" BBB chain, I have over 400' of chain and try to use as much as is appropriate for the anchorage we are in. In that we often cruise with other families most nights we have at least one or two other boats tied along side.

A Morning To Remember

As the sun went down so did the wind and we had a very comfortable night on the anchor. In the morning Karla and I got up early and gathered up the



crab pot with two very nice Dungeness crab inside and got the boat ready to depart. As we pulled the anchor and headed out into the channel between San Juan and Lopez Islands it was one of those mornings you never forget. It was calm as glass and birds and seals were visible in all directions, the morning light was very easy on the eyes. As we traveled North we passed Spiden and Stuart Islands we saw several small pilot whales or Black Fish feeding in the channel. When we were about a half hour out of Bedwell harbor I woke up the kids so that they could help us with the 17' Whaler we were towing and help handle the dock lines as we went to the pier to clear Canadian Customs. The Customs facility at Bedwell has about 200' of dock for boats with the end of one dock designated for seaplanes



The Customs Officers have always been friendly and professional with the process of clearing us and our vessel into British Columbia . The upland facilities at Bedwell have recently gone through a change of ownership and the new owners are in the process of constructing a new and much improved Hotel and pool facility. We look forward to coming back in a few years to visit this new and much improved Bedwell Harbor . After leaving Bedwell we again traveled North up the West side of South Pender Island toward Ganges on Saltspring Island . As you head up the East side of Saltspring it is important to keep your eyes open for the many crab buoys in this channel. Getting one of these buoys wrapped up in your propeller can cause considerable damage to your running gear. We pulled into Ganges Harbor and anchored among the many other boats in the harbor. It was still early in the afternoon so we gathered up our postcards and shopping lists and headed into town. The Thriftway store and Moaut shopping center are right on the waterfront providing easy access to the boaters. The city has provided a dock for tenders and a water taxi service to pick you up and return you to your boat. All of the town's shops and services are within easy walking distance of the dock and marina. After getting groceries and some gifts we returned to the Lady Karla and put together some appetizers to share with our friends the Nelsons on the dock. After dinner the kids all headed out to set the crab pots and try their luck at fishing on some of the reefs at the entrance of the harbor. After another calm night on the anchor I got the kids up at 5:00 am and we went out in the Whaler to see if we could catch a salmon. We trolled South along Saltspring Island and then headed over toward Active Pass and tried trolling along some of the rip tides that were forming. The wind was starting to come up so we decided to head back to Ganges and get some breakfast. The kids were a bit disappointed that we had not caught any fish so we decided to stop and pull up the crab pot. As they started to pull the pot it was heavy so they were excited that we had caught some crab. Once in the boat we could count four large crabs and several small female crabs. The kids sorted the keepers into a bucket and dumped the small crab back before putting the pot

back down. They were all smiles as we got back to the boats with our bucket of Dungeness Crab.

After a big breakfast and some more shopping in town we pulled up the anchor and moved to Maracaibo in Long Harbor . This harbor is less than a mile East of Ganges and runs North and South just like the harbor at Ganges . Maracaibo is a private marina with a beautiful upland swimming lake, showers, laundry, and a park setting that is as pretty a setting as any in the Gulf Islands .

Lady Karla Rolls With The Punches...

We spent two nights at the dock at Maracaibo as the guest's of our new friend Bob Taylor. The kids swam in the lake, pulled each other behind the



Whaler and sailed in the bay in the Laser sailboats provided by the resort. On the morning of our departure we got up at 4:00 am and got underway. We wanted to get through Poulter Pass at slack water and across the Straits of Georgia before the wind had a chance to make the crossing uncomfortable. As it turned out it took a little longer than we thought it would

to get to Poulter Pass so we were bucking a good 3 knots of current through the pass. Heading North East across the Straits of Georgia we were for the first time on this trip out in open water that can expose our boats to some serious wind and wave conditions. The sun was coming up and with it the wind was picking up. As we moved clear of the coastal islands and were out to where we could feel the Northwest wind and swell I wished that we had got up earlier. We settled into our course for Welcome Pass 24 miles ahead, the wind was 15 to 20 knots out of the NW the swells were 4 ft with whitecaps. The ride on the Lady Karla was not uncomfortable but it was very active, the kids were



still in bed and Karla was asleep in the pilothouse berth. The Noordwijk was following in our wake and was taking quite a beating in the present sea conditions. We kept up our speed and course and were making good headway, after about two hours we started to get into the lee of Lesquiti and Texada Islands . The swells started to moderate and within another half-hour the wind was letting down. We

pulled into a small cove on the South end of Texada Island and anchored in about 30 feet of water. As we turned off the engines and felt the calm of the small bay it great to once again be still and quite! Karla fixed a big breakfast and we all enjoyed having the crossing of the Straits of Georgia behind us. After our short break we again pulled the anchor and headed North up the East side of Texada Island our goal was to go another 55 miles to the Copeland Islands just north of Lund. Karla and the kids each took a one-hour watch piloting the boat up the coast, this really helped me by giving me time to nap and eat as we traveled on North. When we entered into the Copeland Island Marine Park and anchored it was 6:00 p.m. 14 hours since we had departed Maracaibo in Long Harbor .

A Good Friend Is A Cold Refrigerator...

Having this huge day of travel behind us was a great relief, we now felt like we were a long way North. We decided to spend two nights on anchor here in the Copelands. We all slept hard and got up late and had a lazy morning, I gathered oysters and placed them in a large mesh bag that I hung off the back of the boat. The Nelsons generator needed a new seawater impeller installed so we took the pump off and took it to Lund where we found an impeller and a



mechanic willing to install it. I got the pump re-installed on the generator and we started it up for a test run. It ran for about 15 minutes with very little water flow out of the exhaust and then it shut itself down. We determined that the heat exchanger was plugged up with debris and would not pass enough water to cool the engine. Since we had no access to parts or gaskets for the heat exchanger we decided to move what frozen food we could to our freezer and we plugged the Nordwjikes shore power cord into the Lady Karla to keep their refrigeration and the battery chargers going. Our second evening at the Copeland Islands ended with an extraordinary sunset of red and blue. We were awoken about 3:00 am to wind and thunder; I got up and moved to the pilothouse to make sure that our anchor was holding. Over the next hour the entire family joined me in the pilothouse and we were witnesses to the most amazing thunder & lightning storm we had ever seen. As the lightning ended the rain came in, by daylight the skies were gray and it was raining hard. After breakfast the rain had let up so Karla and I took the Whaler over to Savory Island to dig some steamer clams. We waded ashore and started to look around for some sign of clams. We dug several holes and walked a good deal of the beach with out finding any steamers clams. We were about to leave but I wanted to try one more spot right up by the gravel beach. On the first scoop with the shovel I had 8 to 10 clams, within another 10 minutes we had a full bucket of steamer clam's to take back to the boat. By now it was raining again and we were soaked to the skin as we climbed back into the Whaler and headed back to the Copeland



Islands . After lunch we headed North around Sara Point into the Desolation Sound Marine Park Area. The rain was poring down as we turned South down Pina Inlet toward our next anchorage. We had decided to go to Grace Harbor . We had been here years before and had enjoyed the peaceful setting and the hikes ashore on the old logging roads. We again anchored in about 30' of water and ran a stern line into the beach where we tied to a large tree. The Nelsons came along side the Lady Karla and we tied up them up and plugged their shorepower cord in to our power. As the rains continued we spent the rest of the day reading talking and watching movies. In the morning the sky was getting lighter and the showers had stopped. We took a nice walk through the woods and explored the small waterfall and the abandon logging equipment in the woods.

As we pulled the anchor and cruised out of the bay the sun was breaking out and it looked like our sunny summer weather was returning. We only moved a few miles to the North to Tenedos Bay . On the way into the bay we stopped at a very deep area

and put our shrimp pot baited with gourmet cat food down in about 430' of water. The bay had several boats in it all ready so we had to anchor in about 75' of water, a little deeper then we would have liked but ok in such a protected harbor. Once we had tied back to the beach and settled in the kids all wanted to walk up to the lake for a look around. As we walked on the trail up to the lake we could hear several groups of people enjoying the many pools in the stream that comes out of the lake. The Lake has a large log jam that you either need to go over or around to go swimming in the lake. The kids decided to just play on the logs for a while and then hike back down the trail. Once back on the boat I got Peter to help me shuck a few Oysters and we cooked up Oysters and Steamer Clams for an appetizer during our happy hour. After dinner Karla and I took a ride all around the harbor, it was fun to explorer all the little nooks and protected areas that were available for boaters to anchor in. After a big breakfast in the morning it was time to go gather up the Shrimp pot. The water is very deep so we took both of our tenders out and I installed a small pulley on a line at the bow of my Whaler, we ran the line through the pulley and tied it off to the Nelsons tender. As they pulled away from us the pot was pulled from the bottom and up to the bow of my Whaler. As the pot broke the surface the kids were squealing, the pot was just crawling with Jumbo Shrimp! We lifted the pot aboard and as I carefully coiled our line to keep it from getting tangled the kids moved the shrimp from the pot to the bucket.



Squirrel Cove



When we got back to the boats the kids reported that we had caught 64 Jumbo Shrimp! Today's trip to Squirrel Cove would be just over 10 miles, the sun was out and it was a beautiful afternoon cruise past Mink Island and Refuge Cove to the very popular anchorage at Squirrel Cove. As soon as we got the anchor down the kids started to get out the air mattresses and rafts to inflate with the compressor. As the kids paddled away toward the rapids with their fleet of inflatable toys we gathered up some refreshments and followed in the Whaler. The Rapids at Squirrel Cove are a result of the water flowing in and out of a large saltwater lagoon. In that the tide was high the water was swiftly flowing into the lagoon. The kids catch the current and ride the flow through the rapids and end up in the lagoon. They then paddle over to the beach and walk back to the bay over the rocks to do it all again. This is the kind of enchanted place where memories are made that last a lifetime. Allen took the tender over to the floating bakery and placed our order for fresh cinnamon rolls to be picked up in the morning. Karla and I prepared a Seafood Feast of Shrimp, Oysters and Steamer Clams; Joke cooked up a couple of pizzas on the Barbecue for the kids.



Our plan for the next day was to head North up the East side of Cortes Island to the Teakeren Arm where there is a wonderful waterfall and a Lake to swim in. The only problem with this site is that there is very little shallow water that one can anchor in, the water is deep and the bottom is rock. We pulled up right in front of the waterfall and anchored in 90' of water. With 200' of chain out we settled in about 50' off the rock wall. The wind was

steady at about 5 knots out of the South. I took everyone over to the little park access dock in the Whaler so that they could hike up to the Lake and then I returned to the boat to keep an eye on the boats.



After about an hour of peace and quite on the boat by myself I heard my name, the kids were calling from the rock wall at the top of the waterfall. It was so quite I could hear them as clear as if they were with me on the boat. I picked everyone up at the dock and we returned to the boats to continue our trip up and around Cortes Island . At the North end of Cortes Island we turned South down the channel between Read Island and Cortes. Our destination was Heriot Bay on Quadra Island . We were picking up my parents at the Heriot Bay Marina, they had driven their car up from Seattle WA by taking two rides on the BC ferries. We got some laundry done at the Heriot Inn and picked up some fresh groceries at the Island Market just a short walk up the hill. The Island Market has a small truck that will deliver you and your groceries back down to your boat in the marina. As long as it was handy we moved over to the fuel dock and topped off our tanks before moving down into Drew harbor behind Rebecca Spit Provincial Park to anchor for the night. We spent another comfortable night on the anchor and departed mid morning for a 12.5 mile run North up the East side of Quadra Island to the Octopus Islands Marine Park . In order to get there we had to go through the Surge Narrows at slack water. This is a tight little area among a group of islands called the Settlers Group, the channel is deep and well charted but should be transited at or near slack water by vessels with limited maneuverability. The Octopus Islands Marine Park is a group of about 12 islands that form many little bays and nooks that boats can anchor in. Since you have to transit an area of rapids no matter witch way you approach this area there are fewer boats then you might expect. What we like most about this area is the sense of isolation and the plentiful seafood and wildlife. There are Eagles, Deer, Seals as well as Oysters, Clams, Crab and Shrimp. It is a area where it is very easy to see that their has been very little change in the last several hundred years.



After two wonderful days at the Octopus Island Marine Park we returned to Heriot Bay to drop off my parents and my oldest daughter Elizabeth so that they could return to Seattle . We spent another night on the anchor behind Rebecca Spit and did some clam digging along the channel side of the Spit. We decided that we were ready to go to a marina for a night so we called and got reservations at Gorge Marina on Cortes Island . Our trip to Gorge Marina took us East across the Sutil Channel toward Whale Town on Cortes Island . Just South of Whale Town we passed through a tiny little channel called Uganda Passage at the North tip of Marina Island . The passage is will marked but has several turns in it that you need to pay attention to. After passing several small islets we turned North into the dramatic entrance of Gorge Harbor , the high rock walls rise straight up from the sides of the channel that is about 200' wide as you pass into the harbor. The harbor has several aquaculture operations as well as the Marina and plenty of area for anchorage. We got our boats secured at the Gorge Marina and connected to shorepower for the first time in two weeks.

Roscoe Bay

It was really nice to step off onto the dock and walk around the resort grounds whenever you felt like it. The facility is very well kept and has a good store and laundry room. We made reservations at the Float House Restaurant for dinner and were treated to one of the best prepared and presented meals we have ever had. It was truly a great meal in an exquisite setting. At mid-morning the following day we left Gorge Harbor and headed over to one of our all time favorite spots Roscoe Bay . This bay is on the East side of West Redonda just North of Homfray Channel. Roscoe bay has a drying sandbar at its entrance that requires you to pay attention to the tide in order to



assure that there is adequate water to enter or exit the bay. We waited just outside the entrance for about a half-hour before we passed over the sandbar and into the anchorage. There were quite a few boats in the bay so we went way back into the bay and anchored in 20' of water and tied back to the bank. This bay is surrounded by high wooded banks and often is so still that the surface is smooth as a mirror. At the head of the bay are a couple of improved campsites with fire pits and an outhouse. Up a short trail is Black Lake with easy access off of the rock bank to swim in the fresh clear water. We stayed on for two nights at Roscoe bay and then moved just 7 miles up the channel to Walsh Cove Marine Park .

When we arrived the wind was blowing out of the North so it was a bit of a challenge to anchor and then run a line to the beach. We ended up using the Whaler to help push the Lady Karla up wind as the all hands pulled on the shoreline to get the boat into position. Once we were secured and settled in we all went exploring around the reefs and protection islands of this great little cove. The wind settled down in the evening and we had a very comfortable night.



In the morning we continued North up the channel to Dean Point and then West in Pryce Channel past Raza Island to Big Bay Resort on Stuart Island. We were making this little side trip to Big Bay to pick up our 17' Whaler that had broken down there a week earlier during a morning fishing trip. In order to get into Big Bay from the South you need to go through the Yuculat Rapids and pass Whirlpool point. The currents in this area can run in excess of 10 knots and often create large whirlpools during the maximum stage of the tide. We had to go in to the bay on slack water and then wait for 5 hours to catch the next slack water to exit the bay traveling South. We then turned East through the "Hole in the Wall" a very narrow channel between Senora Island and Maurelle Island . This channel has very high rock walls on both sides as we traveled West through and channel the wind increased to about 40 miles per hour. Again we needed to catch the slack water at the narrow West end of the Hole in the Wall. There was minimal current as we passed through the narrows and turned North toward our destination Owen Bay . We had one more rapids to pass through to get to Owen Bay , as we approached the Upper Rapids our fourth area of rapids for the day our luck was running out. The current here was building and we could see whirlpools developing in the channel ahead of us.

"It's Been A Lovely Cruise..."

We were traveling at close to 10 knots through the water and only 4 knots over the ground. We kept pushing North toward Grant Island on the East side of the channel and turned into the protection of Owen bay, As we pulled into the bay an checked out the recommended anchorage on the North side of the bay I realized that we were going to spend our last night in the Desolation Sound area anchored all alone with only our traveling partners along tied side. We all gathered after dinner in the pilothouse of the Lady Karla to see the slide show of all of our digital pictures from the three weeks we had spent cruising together. The next morning we again headed East along Quadra Island to Granite Point and the intersection with the Discovery Channel. Here we turned South and traveled through the Semore Narrows to the town of Campbell River where we had a moorage reservation at the Discovery Harbor Marina. This was where we would end our Summer trip aboard the Lady Karla and drive home to Kent Washington. We turned the boat over to our long time friends Thom and Debbie Davis. They would spend a mini vacation together bringing the boat back into the United States and then down the Sound to Seattle.



For Karla and I this was a trip of a lifetime with our good friends the Nelsons and our teenage children. We knew from the beginning that this may well be the last trip of this length that we would get to take with our daughters as they get busy with jobs and their college education.

Smooth Sailing!

Rob, Karla, Elizabeth and Emily

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