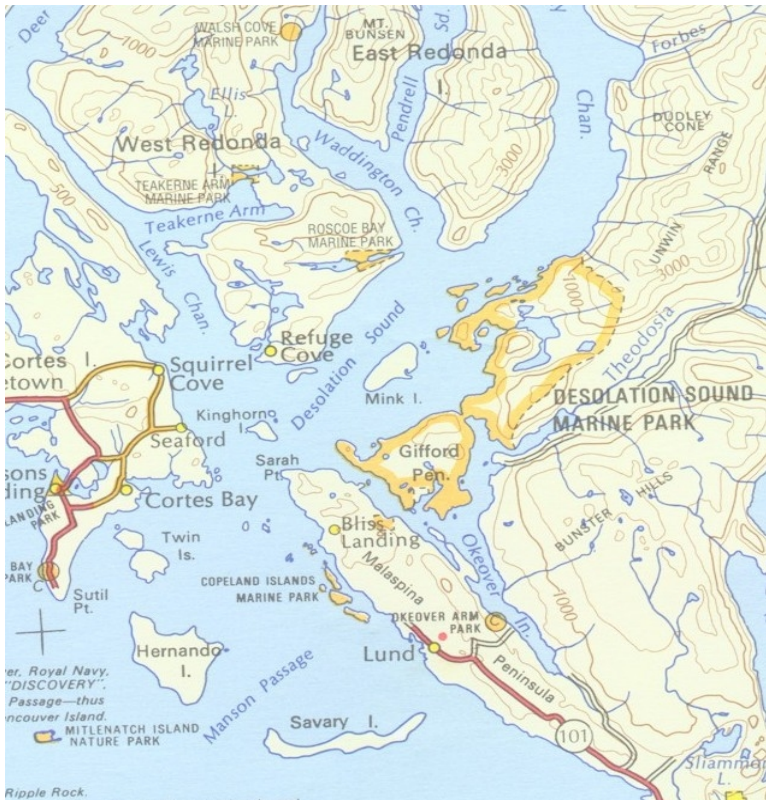


# Desolation Sound 1997



In September 1997 my wife Connie and I loaded our new kayaks on top of the wagon and headed north for Desolation Sound. Had we been kayaking only six months?

To now, my trip planning consisted of timing the ferries. I didn't have a chart of the area, but figured what the heck, I'll pick one up when I get there.

We spent a night in Bellingham to get up early the next day and catch an early ferry at Horseshoe Bay the next morning. Something about Horseshoe bay captures the excited energy of travelers arriving and departing and packages it into one of the nicest little places around Vancouver, BC.

Traffic was heavy, but well behaved through Gibsons and Seychelle. It thinned out after the last of the short-boats atop other vehicles turned toward the Seychelle rapids. After another short ferry to Saltery Bay shorelines are less cluttered with houses and your chances of spotting otters and eagles improves.

Powell River's lumber mill is the prime industry north of Jervis inlet, but summer tourism has been adding to the area's economy as eco-tourists seek out its isolation and natural beauty.

We followed highway 101 to its northern conclusion, a boat ramp in the town of Lund. An "end of the road" town, nobody just passes through it. It suffers the tourist cycle of too much business to handle when the season is in full swing and too much overhead cost when it's not.

Boaters pass through to more northerly waters and for them Lund is one of the last outposts of civilization before they head into the wilderness. It has a good, large marina, a hotel with a quality restaurant and bar, the obligatory bakery/espresso shop, a general store/post office and other marina support businesses. There's even a helipad if you're in a

hurry to get relaxed....

In 1997, there was a kayak shop at the back of the Hotel. Another kayak expedition outfitter ran a small restaurant on the other side of the bay.

Connie and I spent a night at the hotel in Lund and did *not* encounter the resident ghost, but we did encounter an early rain. That's when I learned to loosen the kayak straps and tilt the boats while overnighting. It keeps rain from pooling in the cockpit covers and seeping through into the boats.

I also learned that charts are in short supply at the end of the season. The more you fail to foresee, the more you learn.

We ate breakfast with the outfitter across the bay who showed us his area chart and recommended some camp spots. He also suggested a short half-mile paddle across to Savary Island to check out their fine sandy beaches.

Parking is in short supply in Lund. After unloading our boats and gear at the ramp behind the hotel, we turned our car over to the local valet parking service to care for until our return.

We got on the water just before noon. The straits didn't look calm when we left but the chop seemed manageable from our perspective. A light 5-10 knot breeze in our face didn't cause much concern either, but as we neared Savary island I began to be very concerned.

The island's distance from the mainland may have been half a mile, but our paddle from Lund was longer. It took an hour, which meant it was two to three miles or the wind was

stronger than we guessed, or both. The light breeze we started with became a wind by our midpoint and the small chop built to three feet before easing as we entered the wind-shadow of Savary Island.

Outward we headed into the wind and waves, but I was nervous about going on to our planned campsite for the evening, the Copeland islands, five miles northwest, ahead of the wind.

Breakers thundered on the west end of Savary island as we approached, and the thought of going into the wind and waves around that point scared me. We chose instead to cruise up the leeward side instead of rounding to the windward south side. Apparently the leeward (northern) side of the island is the favored shoreline. It was all houses.

Eventually we either had to go or claim an emergency and impose on someone on the island. We were both novice paddlers and being a novice means you don't know things. Our subjective seamanship meant we'd rather drown than ask if we could camp on someone's beach for the night. That's my after-the-fact objective analysis.

Turning to the task of getting to the Copeland islands, we paddled back to the east tracking straight out from Savary Island, hoping to stay in its wind shadow for awhile. We could see the seas out ahead and they didn't look like fun.

We went about a quarter mile before it became obvious that wasn't a good strategy for us. The wind had grown to 20 knots and running against a mild ebb was tossing up three to four foot waves. More experienced paddlers may have revelled in having the wind and wave at their backs, but not us. We (I)

decided we should turn into the wind and “ferry” across the space between us and the mainland shore, roughly a mile.

We aimed for Hurtado point, south of Lund, and though we tried to stay close together, all but the top of my head would be hidden from Connie as the waves rolling past put us in separate troughs. We had to shout to have a chance of being heard and that was iffy.

The wind and waves working to push us northwest kept us in a fairly straight but very slow ferry track toward the mainland. But it kept us in control enough to be able to talk to each other at least some of the time. What would happen if one of us went over? Pool training doesn't begin to feel like *THIS!*

The mainland shore gave no protection. Fifty yards from the overhung shoreline it was time to turn and run. As I reflect on that situation from a later time, we *MAY* have been protected from the worst of the crests nearer inshore, but that was scant comfort.

We turned without incident, but now began the *REAL* struggle began. Staying together was impossible! The tiniest thrust of paddle set my boat leaping ahead on the surf while Connie disappeared from sight and hearing aft. Then I had to back paddle to wait for her and my own stability became precarious. I teetered atop the crests and got soaked in the troughs. I was angry at my inability to stay in touch. I thought she was plodding along on purpose, when she was in struggling with a boat and paddle that performed differently than mine. We passed Lund without even noticing it and I dove into the lee of a small cove to wait for her, hoping she'd seen me go in.

Connie didn't want to rest too long, fearing she'd cool

down too much. We went back out into the wind and ran toward our goal, but I still couldn't keep to her pace. I ran ahead to a small calm in the lee of a mid-channel rock. Connie dropped into my safe spot after a few more seconds and after another short breather we angled across the waves, but now, closer to the islands, the action eased and it was a short hundred strokes to the lee of the southern-most Copeland Island.

I gave a huge sigh of relief as we made it to that lee shore and for the first time since we set out that morning, opened my spray skirt and dug out my camera.



*Copeland Islands near Lund*

Paddling along the shore led us to a small, out of the wind gravel beach below a grassy saddle between the two higher rocks of that first island. Two tent platforms were obligingly placed near the grassy saddle, and off to one side a discrete outhouse sat screened from casual visibility.

Our tent was too large for the platform and would have suffered from wind off the straits so we placed it slightly down slope and used the tent platform for cooking.

The little island was a shellfish paradise; Oysters, butterclams, mussels and probably more varieties hung on every rock around the shoreline. Connie loves Oysters and happily gathered a few then began steaming them. Then she realized she had no way to open them. Visualize if you will a very civilized woman squatting on the ground trying to hold hot oyster shells on a rock with one hand and crack them with a hatchet in the other. Have I mentioned how kayaking can turn you into a savage?



I liked this campsite. The Copelands are only a couple of miles from Lund, so many kayakers hurry past on their way to farther destinations. But the Malaspina Peninsula shoreline a



quarter mile away is a vertical cliff in most places, so even if you're just paddling along their lee shores on your way elsewhere, the islands give wind protected paddling, and the route keeps you out of the way of large powerboats moving from or to Lund.

We broke camp and left after a lazy breakfast the next morning. The forecast was for milder winds and higher pressure but the skies were still overcast. Where more open water loomed we crossed the quarter-mile gap to the mainland side, aiming for Bliss landing. We eased north with a mild flood current which carried us around Sarah Point for our first look into Desolation Sound.

The sound was covered with a mid-height layer of clouds which hid the high peaks, but kayakers are so low on the water that every new vista seems incredibly panoramic.

There were homes in different stages of construction lining the mainland shore. That surprised me, but marine parks came long after people.

The sun warmed us and the sea was mirror smooth so we chose a long crossing angle towards the little peninsula that juts out of Minke Island. Our outfitter friend had suggested camping on the Curme Islands just north of Minke. They aren't part of the park, but are popular because their small size makes them unattractive to other large critters.

It only took four hours to reach the Curmes. We took our time checking out all the islands and decided that most seemed too low for confident camping. These islands are rocks covered with thin soil. They harbor stubborn grasses, small shrubs and stunted trees that look like natural Bonsai. Tents rub the grass

off and create a low spots where rainwater pools. One such landing was like cruising into a roman bath. Stacks of square blocks that nature formed into stair stepping piers looked like a nice landing but the low flat spots for tents were pools of standing water.



*Curmes Islt landing*

Finally we cruied into a narrow channel between two islands and found a nicely sloped gravel ramp to higher ground. The tide was still close to high slack and we struggled our laden boats onto higher rocks and tied them to low shrubs to scout

for a tent site. It didn't take much scouting. We found a mildly sloping bare spot fairly close atop the isle and staked our temporary claim.

The sky was beginning to feel heavier and we hurried to get the tent and campsite set up and covered. We added tarps overhead to keep a kitchen area near the tent relatively dry too. As I tied off the last guy lines on the tarp it began to rain... ... and rain... ...and rain.

We had no route pre-set and with a week to ourselves weren't in a hurry to leave. Winds with the rain weren't as big as we'd already experience, but were forecast to be much higher. Gale force winds every day! We sat atop our rock and watched the water. One to one and a half foot chop seemed manageable, if it didn't change.

A few other kayakers moved around but I didn't feel confident in reading the weather after our initial ride. We huddled under our tarps for two days, venturing out only during brief dry periods.



*Curmes campsite*

Deeper ground water pools gave us a source of fresh water that we could filter into our storage bags and treat with iodine.

We learned to cope with the Cedar tint.

Our island doubled in size at half tide, exposing a rock bridge to the next small islet where we had first paddled in. Shellfish sprouted generously in this gap, to Connie's delight. Her Oyster cracking improved until we heard a red tide warning broadcast and had to stop. She gazed mournfully at the shell-covered rocks and constantly asked me if it was possible that we weren't experiencing the red tide *here*.

After two days waiting on the weather the forecast called for gentler weather the next day. If we used the weather to move further up Desolation Sound we might be trapped by more bad weather beyond our vacation limits. It was time to head back.



*Connie on the rocks.*

That day started a little drier so we delayed packing the

tarp, rainfly and tent until they'd had a bit more chance to dry out. Bag by bag our gear got ferried back to the boats. Carrying each laden kayak in turn over the sharp rocks to the waterline, we finally launched into a light wind and mild ripples on the water. Paddling across to Tenedos bay first, we held closer to the shoreline on our way back. We caught up with some other kayakers for awhile near Zephine head, then stopped for lunch at low slack after rounding Sarah point.

Cold cuts on a rock beach under darkening skies made for a hurried lunch. After passing Bliss Landing we chose to hold on the Malaspina peninsula shore. The anchored log boom we passed on our way out loomed and we heard the sound of running water like someone left a tap on, so we moved out from the boom a bit more. The churning water at the front of the anchored boom made it apparent that the current was sucking itself under the boom. We circling around the roiling water at it's head and marked another lesson learned. ...And one not learned.

The slot between the peninsula sharply rising on our left and the Copelands just a few hundred years to our right funneled the afternoon winds at us at nearly 15 knots. Moving with the incoming tide, as evidenced by the water flowing under the front of the log boom should have taught us, it wasn't raising a lot of chop but we were pushing against both wind and tide and not making a lot of headway. Connie didn't want to move out to the islands and I wasn't sure enough that it would be better to do so. We struggled on straight into the push against us. The chop built up against us and one power boater asked in passing if we were okay. Of course we said we were... ... but it was slow work.

I'm sure now we would have been much better off to work

both the wind shadows and back eddies in the nearby islands, but we plodded straight on. Power boats coming by slowed as they passed to avoid complicating our stupidity. I appreciated that. Or maybe they were just laughing at us. As we emerged from the cliff-faced slot the clapotis eased but the oncoming waves showed more height, building to about two feet. We worked wind shadows along the shore until we finally made our way into Lund and gratefully landed.

I unloaded boats and gear while Connie went to retrieve our car. Just as we were cinching the boats atop the car, the clouds parted and the sun began to shine. I couldn't shake the feeling that somebody was having a good laugh...