

Tales to Take Home from Glacier

JULY/AUGUST 1997

NORTHWEST TRAVEL

AIN'T NO CURE BUT A
**SUMMERTIME
CRUISE** — *San Juans,
Puget Sound, & B.C.'s Kitlope Valley*

MAKING A SPLASH
In Victoria

*An Evening of Music,
Cannons & Fireworks*

**The Livin' is Easy at Bend's
SUMMER FESTIVAL**

August 1997 • \$2.95



My heart rejoices as well. As we move against the current in fresh water, James Robertson signals for us to stop. Bringing the two inflatables together he ceremoniously welcomes our group to the Kitlope by gently splashing a few drops of the river into each of our sunwashed faces. Next Robertson dips his cup into the river, taking the first long draft before passing the cup to his neighbor.

In late May our group, a mix of individuals interested in combining a sailing adventure with learning about the environment and Native heritage, assembles onboard the 72-foot sailing vessel *Duen* (means dove). We are here for a week's cruise of the Kitlope River Valley out of Kitimat around 400 miles north of Vancouver, British Columbia.



The *Duen* had little company as it sailed south from Kitimat toward the Kitlope River Valley. Guests are invited to help crew or take the helm as much as they feel comfortable. Everyone pitches in to hoist and man the sails.

A hodgepodge of ages and professions, we come to discover the terrestrial and aquatic sanctuary of the Kitlope Region.

We want to see the world's largest intact temperate coastal rain forest watershed, complex hanging glaciers, hot springs, wildlife, and waterfalls by the score. We also want to learn about the Haisla people who recently refused millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs in logging over the next 50 years in order to save the southernmost part of their ancestral territory as an 800,000-acre wilderness preserve, and who continue to struggle to protect an additional 100,000 acres of the Greater Kitlope Ecosystem.

Thus, we stow our gear and sail south down Devastation Channel and then east through Gardner Canal on a cruise

where we saw only one other sailboat, two shrimpers, and a pair of helicopters engaged in very expensive logging.

Although trailer boaters and intrepid sailors can access the inside fjords, the most gracious means is on this 1939 built Norwegian sailing vessel. With its enormous timbers and sturdy pine beams, the *Duen* blends with the scenery and acts as cozy home to eight guests housed in four private double berths with en suite lavatory.

Owner-skipper Michael Hobbis has been offering naturalist charter adventures in the Queen Charlotte Islands for more than a decade and heads marine programs at the Lester B. Pearson International College in Victoria, British Columbia. All charters, whether they cruise the Charlottes, Kitlope, or Princess Royal Island to view the Kermode Spirit Bears, include elegant dining, Northwest wines, and a naturalist or native interpreter. While May and September offer the best weather in the Kitlope, stout rain gear and boots remain a necessity - after all, this is a giant, soggy rain forest. For a heavy vessel that maneuvers like tall ship, the *Duen* sails well and guests are invited to crew or take the helm as much as they feel comfortable.



STORY BY LESLEE JAQUETTE



The Upper Tezwa River Valley in the Kitlope Region shows some of the spectacular scenery of the area.

Once underway we take a gander at the charts. We can see it takes a bit of moving to travel the 80 miles from the MK Bay Marina in Kitamaat Village into the Kitlope Valley. This is no hardship because the days are long and each turn down Gardner Canal affords us more gasp-exhale-gasp views of solitary bays as well as waterfalls raining down cliffs varnished in mist. We sight bald eagles, dolphins, and mountain goats. At sunset in the safety of the deep fords, we watch mom harbor seals teach juveniles to

fish by whacking their tails on the pink and silver marbled water.

Along the route Haisla Elder Robertson answers questions and tells stories. He describes how his people never paddled at night because an avalanche could cause a killer tidal wave. He tells us to bother looking for goats only on the east side of the channel and the story of how the North Wind bargained with the People (the animals at that time) that it would only blow for a maximum of two weeks.

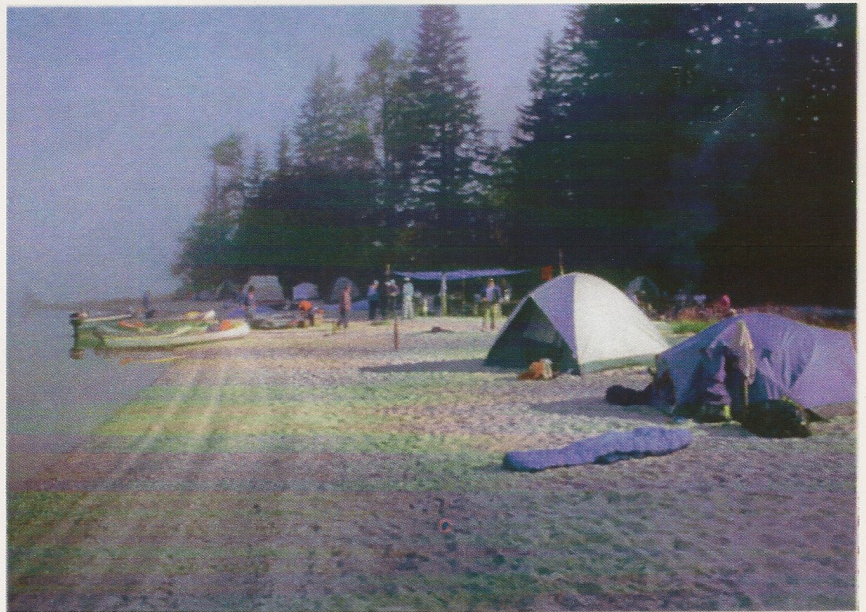
That evening after tying up to a lone shrimp boat, the gang heads to shore at Europa Point for the first of several natural thermal spring sashes.

The next day Robertson invites us to explore the former site of Kemano Bay Village, his family home until the smallpox epidemic of the 1940s decimated the tribe. Later, the surviving Haisla abandoned the area to amalgamate with related peoples in Kitamaat Village.

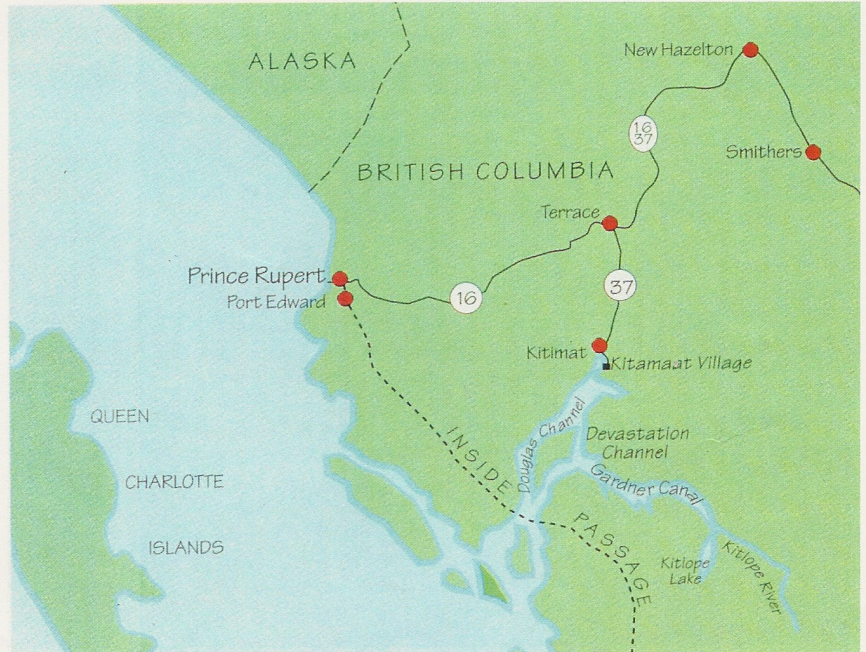
The highlight of the cruise remains our time spent exploring the Kitlope River and Kitlope Lake. We are in awe of the Haisla's determination to preserve the region. Working with Oregon-based Ecotrust, the Haisla Nation was able to show that the valley is the largest and most abundant rain forest of its type remaining on the globe.

Arriving at the end of the fiord, the crew anchors the *Duen* at the mouth of the Kitlope Delta. We explore the 8-mile distance through the estuary and upriver to the lake by inflatable dinghy. Several miles up the broadening delta, Robertson shows us the Haisla Rediscovery Programs camp for teens of all backgrounds.

The rediscovery camp is based at A-Goy-U-Wa (where the beach is wide) on Kitlope Lake in the heart of the Kitlope ecosystem. *Duen's* guests have the option of staying in the cabin or camping at this spot in order to expedite inflatable forays into the estuary. As we fight the current, Robertson explains that some 10,000 people once lived in different clan homesites in this valley.



Ecotrust's camp at Kitlope Lake. This Oregon-based group worked with the Haisla Nation to do research on the rain forest.



After a three-hour motor up the glacier water-gorged river we reach our destination the former village site of the Eagle Clan. Our timing is good. A class of high school students from Kitimat, participating in the Rediscovery Program, is out on the sandspit. They jostle one another off fallen logs into the frigid lake water. Our group picnics and kayaks. Later we tour the lake for glimpses of seal haul-outs and pictographs. Robertson relates the tragic tale of the ancient rock face called Man Who Turned to Stone. On the return downriver we spot a mountain goat within camera shot and a black bear sow munching tall grass on the riverbank.

The last evening back on the *Duen* our gang huddles together in the main saloon. Robertson shares his poem, the "Rediscovery Prayer."

Looking into our faces he reads in deep, measured tones, "Welcome to the great cathedral, the Kitlope. My heart is at peace as I return to my ancestral homeland. This is my heart saying thank you to the people who love this area." ❁

LOCAL TEMPTATIONS

Industrious travelers will recognize Kitimat is far from the "end-of-the-road". It is a planned community of 11,700 that was built in the early 1950's to be home to workers at Alcan, the world's largest aluminium smelter. Since then Eurocan Pulp and Paper and Methanex have located their plants here too. All three offer free public tours.

Outside the mills, Kitimat is a clean, prosperous community situated in the dramatic outdoors. Most visitors are drawn to Douglas Channel, the 130-mile saltwater passage that leads to the Pacific Ocean, for sightseeing, fishing, or scuba diving. On land folks can hike the area's many trails or tour the Kitimat River Fish Hatchery and view the 500-year-old-Sitka spruce, the largest living tree of its kind in the province. Learn about local history at the Kitimat Centennial Museum and Mike's Wildlife Museum, with its more than 100 taxidermy mounts. Kitimat offers a broad range of accommodations and 18-hole Hirsch Creek Golf Course, rated among the top 10 course in B.C. and surrounded by elegant peaks and 300-year-old cedars.

For more information contact the Kitimat Chamber of Commerce, PO Box 214, Kitimat, B.C. V8C 2G7 (1-800-664-6554 or 250-632-6294) or the Kitimaat Village Council: Haisla PO Box 1101, Kitimaat Village, B.C. V0T 2B0 (604-639-9361)

- L. J.

Leslee Jaquette, freelance writer-photographer, specializes in outdoor, travel, and business writing. Her outdoor passions include boating, running, cycling, scuba diving, skiing, and mountaineering.