

Sailing

THE BEAUTY OF SAIL

Fatal Storm

Photos and report from the scene of the Sydney-Hobart disaster

Glorious Cruising

The Kitlope of British Columbia
The Balearics of Spain

February 1999
US \$3.50 CAN \$4.50





Reaching along at an easy pace, the Norwegian fishing boat *Duen* saunters through the Gardener Canal, gateway to the Kitlope River Valley.

Under sail on the Kitlope, cathedral of the Haisla people of British Columbia

By Leslee Jaquette

As we moved against the current, the ocean's salt water turned into fresh water. Our guide, James Robertson, signaled for us to stop. Bringing the two inflatables together, he welcomed our group to British Columbia's Kitlope River Valley, the homeland of the Haisla people, by gently splashing a few drops of the river into each of our faces. Dipping a cup into the river, he took the first long draft before passing

the cup to the person next to him.

In late May, our group, a range of ages and professions, took a weeklong charter cruise aboard the 72-foot *Duen* (meaning dove). Michael Hobbis, *Duen's* owner and skipper, took us through the Inside Passage, approximately 400 miles north of Vancouver. Our experience was a sailing adventure as well a lesson in Haisla culture and the environment.

The Kitlope River Valley is a coastal rain

forest, hanging with glaciers, hot springs, wildlife and waterfalls. The Haisla people recently refused billions of dollars and hundreds of jobs in logging in order to protect their homeland as an 800,000-acre wilderness preserve. As we stowed our gear and sailed south down the Gardener Channel on our one-way cruise, we saw only one other sailboat, two shrimp boats and one pair of helicopters engaged in some very expensive logging.



My heart rejoices as I come into your great Cathedral, the Kitlope.
My heart is joyous, O Great Spirit, to see the beauty of your face here in all of your creation,
Surrounding the Kitlope Lake, the reflections of snow-capped mountains on a calm lake,
The blue skies, the waterfalls are sweet music to hear.”

From “Rediscovery Prayer” by Haisla Elder James Robertson



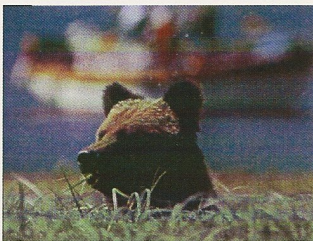
The Kitlope River meanders along the velvet channel of the Upper Tezwa River Valley, continuing her sculpting as she goes.

from Haisla photo

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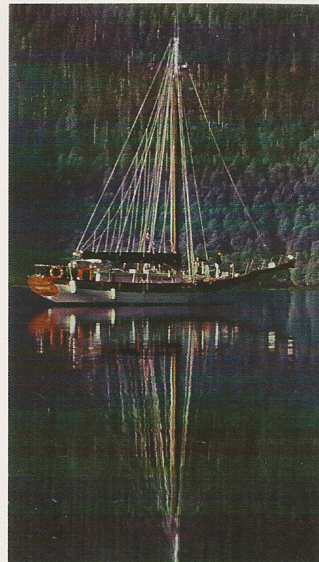
While trailer boaters and Northwest sailors can explore the fjords on their own, we found that chartering *Duen*, a 1939 Norwegian fishing boat, was the most pleasant way to do this. With her enormous timbers, *Duen* was both comfortable and comforting in a world where Robertson's ancient tales sounded like news.



A riverbank covered in sedge is a luncheon buffet for one of the locals, above.

Duen's four double berths, allowed some privacy. We ate well and continually as professional chef and Haisla tribal member George Cross wooed us with hearty soups and homemade bread, fresh seafood and rich desserts, always accompanied by Northwest wines.

All along the 140-mile cruise from Kitamat to the Kitlope River Valley, Robertson answered questions and shared stories. As we sailed down Gardener Channel he told us how his people never paddled their canoes at night for fear of a killer avalanche.



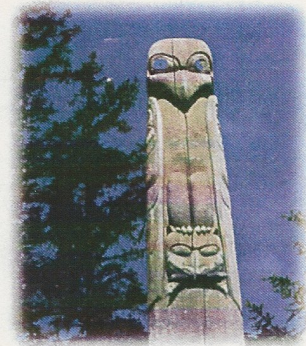
Surrounded by 800,000 acres of wilderness, the 65 foot Ocean Light, above is the only other sailboat *Duen* met on her one-way journey to Kitlope Lake.

He told us to only bother looking for goats on the east side of the channel and the story of how the North Wind promised The People (the animals at that time) that it would only blow for two weeks at a time.

On a latitude comparable to southeast Alaska, we gasped as rows of the raw and rugged Coast Mountains rose in volcanic spires from winding fjords hundreds of feet deep. Rivers of glacier melt fell in webs, sheets and torrents down sheer granite faces into ever-narrowing channels. Mountain goats grazed in crannies a spider would skirt while seals on the

hunt slapped their tails on the milky water's surface.

Visually overwhelmed at the end of our first long day, we tied up to a shrimp boat moored at Shearwater Point in Alan Reach about 43 miles from Kitamat. After a late dinner, we headed to shore at Europe Spring to slosh in the natural thermal springs.



A totem pole stands outside the village of Kemano.

Our second day was full of great contrasts. At noon we stopped at Kemano Bay, Robertson's family home until the late 1940s when a smallpox epidemic nearly wiped out the tribe. Later, surviving Haisla abandoned the region to join with other tribal members in Kitamat. Quietly, respectfully, we explored the remains of buildings, gravestones and watched the new totem being carved by Robert J. Stewart.

A town of 200 people, Kemano boasts a handsome dock, a yacht club with only one sailboat and a golf course. Boaters are welcome to visit; there is a nightly moorage fee. Visitors must ask permission to visit the townsite or participate in a tour.

Arriving at the end of the fjord, Hobbs anchored *Duen* at the mouth of the Kitlope delta and we loaded into inflatables. As we motored into the estuary, we were surprised to see how the mountains seemed to recede, opening into an enormous valley, unending wetlands, grass-covered islands and sandbars.

Thousands of people once lived in this area, surviving comfortably off game and fish. Robertson pointed to an overgrown cave in a cliff where women and children hid during Haida slave raids. Historic enemies of the Haida, the Haisla are more closely affiliated with the Bella Coola people, whose contemporary tribal members live in the southern part of the Inside Passage.

We stopped briefly 2 ½ miles upriver at a cabin in an old logging camp. From the cabin, Robertson said we might see bears, beavers, moose, caribou, seals, eagles and even eulachon, a variety of candlefish traditionally

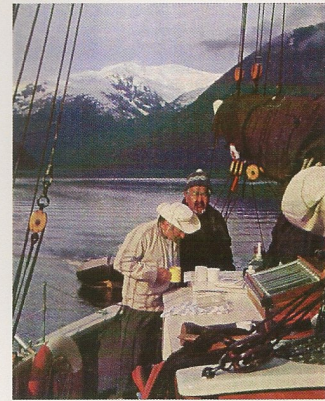
rendered into oil. From the bank we could see a well-worn bear trail and rubbing trees.

Leaving the camp, we paddled and motored 6 miles up the shallow river before moving into Kitlope Lake, which is 8 miles long and more than a mile wide. Ready for a good stretch, we disembarked at a sandspit called McGowan Camp, a former village site of the Eagle Raven Clan.

We searched the lake for glimpses of seal haul-outs and petroglyphs. Robertson related the tale of an ancient rock face called Man Who Turned to Stone. On our way back to the boat we saw a mountain goat and a black bear sow munching tall grass on the riverbank.

That evening, our last on board *Duen*, we huddled together in the main saloon. There, in deep, measured tones, Robertson read us his prayer: “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 people who love this area.”

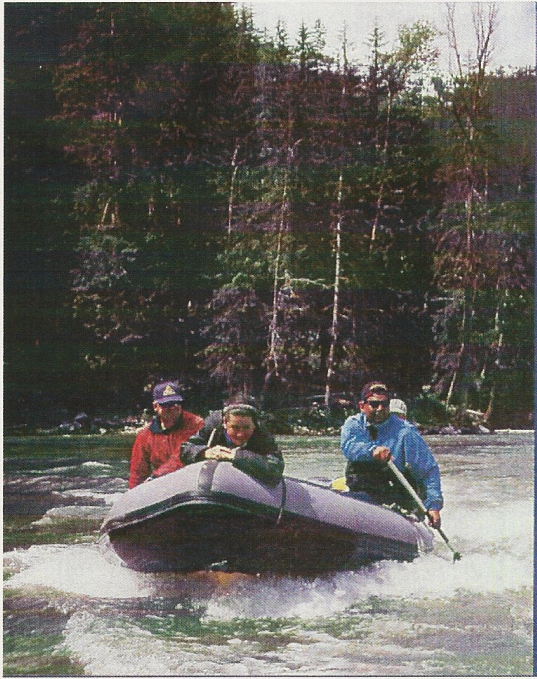
Washington-based photojournalist Leslee Jaquette enjoys charter cruising, kayaking and scuba diving in Puget Sound and Canada.



Waking up to fresh coffee and the raw, rugged peaks of the Coast Mountains, Haisla Elder James Robertson and a crewmember discuss the day's itinerary.



The 72-foot *Duen* becomes diminutive in the presence of the snow-drenched Coast Mountains.



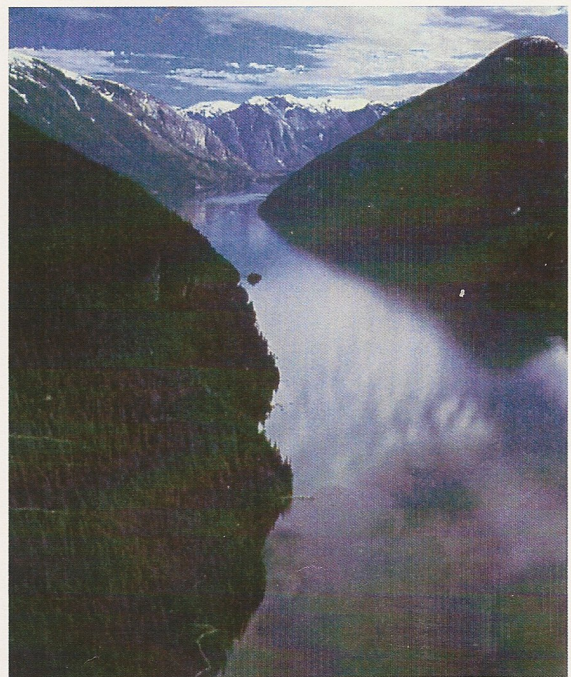
The crew paddles and motor for six miles in the Kitlope River on the way to the Kitlope Lake.



Michael Hobbis readies sail.



The author goes aloft for a view of Douglas Channel.



Duen followed the lush path of the Kitlope estuary to Kitlope Lake.