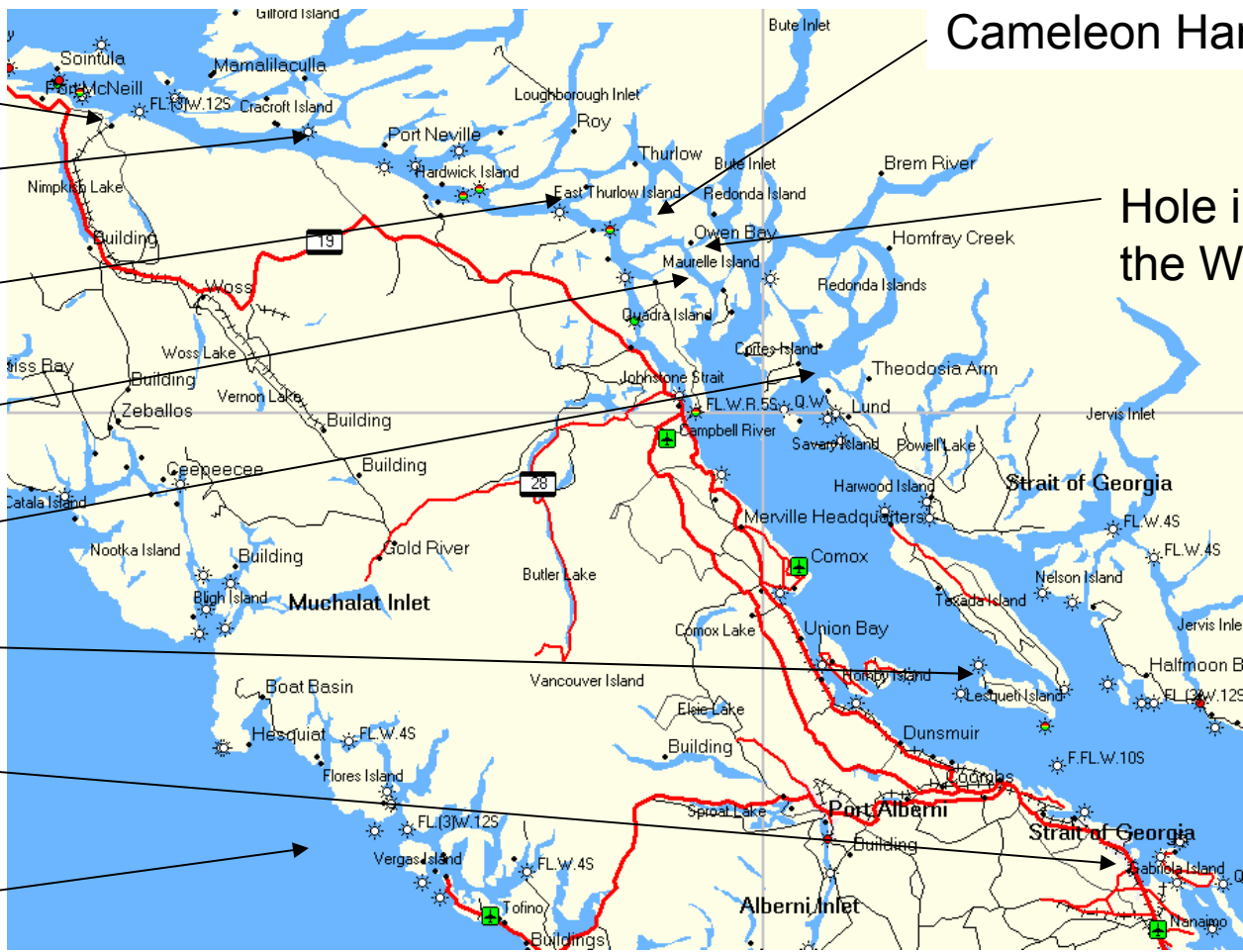


Johnstone Strait

- Orcas (a.k.a. – Killer Whales): Home to both resident pods and visiting transient pods, Johnstone Strait is where the action is.
- Telegraph Cove is the site where the orphan Springer (A73) was reunited with her family pod. Springer was the first Orca to be captured and reintroduced into the wild successfully.
- There was a storm rolling in to the Islands when we left Telegraph Cove to head south. The weather eliminated the persistent fog but made the Strait a choppy mess.
- We listened to the Robson Bight Park Warden (also known as “the rubbing beach”, because the orcas go there to rub against the pebbles) and the whale watching boats on VHF 07 for sightings. Since the Strait was so bumpy we decided to head for a nearby anchorage right in the center of where the orcas usually transit from one waterway to another.
- Upon arriving we heard one of the whale boats off the point announcing they had spotted three males from Pod A36.

Map Time

- Telegraph Cove
- Growler Cove
- Port Neville
- Octopus Islands
- Desolation Sound
- Scottie Bay
- Nanaimo
- Vancouver Island



- Cameleon Harbor
- Hole in the Wall

The Boys from A36



Pod A36



Um, where's the life jackets?



10 feet from our boat



He surfaced right next to us. Naturally, I was facing the other direction and while suppressing my coronary failure, I snapped a crappy photo. He was so close, I could see his eyes.

Growler Cove

- We anchored in Growler Cove to escape the SE winds and seas in Johnstone Strait, only to wake up in the morning to find thick fog.
- We traveled down the Strait hoping to see some more Orcas but the fog prevented us from seeing the bow of the boat, much less the Orcas.
- Here the fog is lifting and those spots on the radar screen materialize into islands.



Port Neville

- We poked our way through the dense fog down the Strait to Port Neville, where there is a public dock watched over by Lorna and her daughter Erica.
- Lorna has lived on their 140+ acres of land for 52 years (where she grew up) and runs the tiny post office that serves two or three year round residents.
- She told us there were black bears and a rogue grizzly that wander the shores. We told her our theory that Canada doesn't really have any bears because we've never seen one.
- She promised to come find us if a bear appeared, but oddly enough, none were to be found....



Cameleon Harbor

- Our next stop was further down Johnstone Strait through a passage where the current reaches 5 knots (called “Race Passage”). Since the fog was so thick early in the morning, we were forced to leave at a time where we’d hit maximum current.
- In the fast flowing currents, our top speed was 11.2 knots going through the tide rips, whirlpools and rapids. It wasn’t too turbulent, but at times our boat was turned suddenly 30-40 degrees by the strong eddies.
- Two Minke whales surfaced 10 feet from our boat, approaching us fast and broadside. Sherrell saw them surface, heading right towards us and almost fainted. Somehow they managed to dive again quickly and miss our boat. I don’t know who was more surprised, us or them.
- After the near whale miss we were on alert until Cameleon Harbor near a BC Marine Park (Thurston Bay Park) where we spotted the elusive Canadian Black Bear.
- To top it off, this blackie had a baby cub with her! The couple in the dinghy got some great photos, unlike mine, taken from quite a distance with binoculars.



Octopus Islands

- Our next stop involved going through more strong tidal streams. This one's max speed is 9 knots and it is very turbulent and filled with dangerous rocks.
- We milled about waiting for a time when the tides were near slack, we figured an hour or so before slack would be ok. In the meantime we puttered around the shores and spotted another bear!
- This one must have been hot, because he jumped in the water and swam around. When he got out he shook himself like a wet dog, pretty funny to watch.
- You can barely (ha) make out his blurry head bobbing in the water.
- I think these bears have some sort of Canadian Voodoo thing going on that prevents Americans from sighting them and photographing them well.



Yes, another blurry wildlife photo!

Octopus Islands

- After waiting a while we watched a fishing boat brave the tidal rapids and another sailboat was coming up from behind. It seemed a little early to us (75 minutes before slack), but we broke the golden rule and decided, if they're going, let's try it.
- We hit 12.0 knots in this narrow stretch of water. It was exactly like running a river. Words fail to describe the scene of white foaming water raging around these hidden reefs. It took everything I had to remain calm and pilot the boat around the hidden rocks, rapids, whirlpools and eddies.
- There was no room for error as the clear channel was only about 100 feet wide and there were massive whirlpools that tried to twist the boat in circles. Sherrell sat there staring at the roaring water and the whirlpools which spun violently in circles, dropping about a foot down in the center.
- The only upside was it took only 60 seconds to pass through the narrowest part by the reefs. We looked at each other, both pale white and agreed we were too early for slack water. The other sailboat behind us turned into a small bay before the rapids....
- Once you've crossed these high current areas near Vancouver Island, you cross an imaginary boundary that a lot of boats don't cross.
- The fast tidal currents keep a lot of boats from going further north, so places like Octopus Islands are as far north as many boats go. As a result we suddenly ran into some big groups of boats.
- The most surprising sight was to see boats smaller than ours again. We hadn't really been conscience of this fact, until we started to see sailboats in the 20-30 foot range again. North of the rapids all the way to Alaska, we were probably one of the smallest boats around, often significantly 10-25 feet smaller than the next smallest boat.
- Getting back to these waters we found the anchorages "crowded" with about 15 boats around. Some of the other boaters in the anchorage kept telling us how empty it was. Seeing this crowd in Octopus Islands (which still requires some minor negotiation of short rapids to get to) we asked about how crowded Desolation Sound was because it is THE cruising destination for most people.
- They assured us that it was practically empty.....

Octopus Islands

- While at the Octo's we rode out a nasty storm that brought tons of rain and bunches of wind. The wind was so strong that we even tried re-anchoring in a narrower part of the bay to escape the strong gusts that heeled the boat over severely.
- When the weather finally cleared up a little bit, we went for a great hike on Quadra Island to a fresh water lake. But don't worry, it wasn't warm enough for skinny dipping.



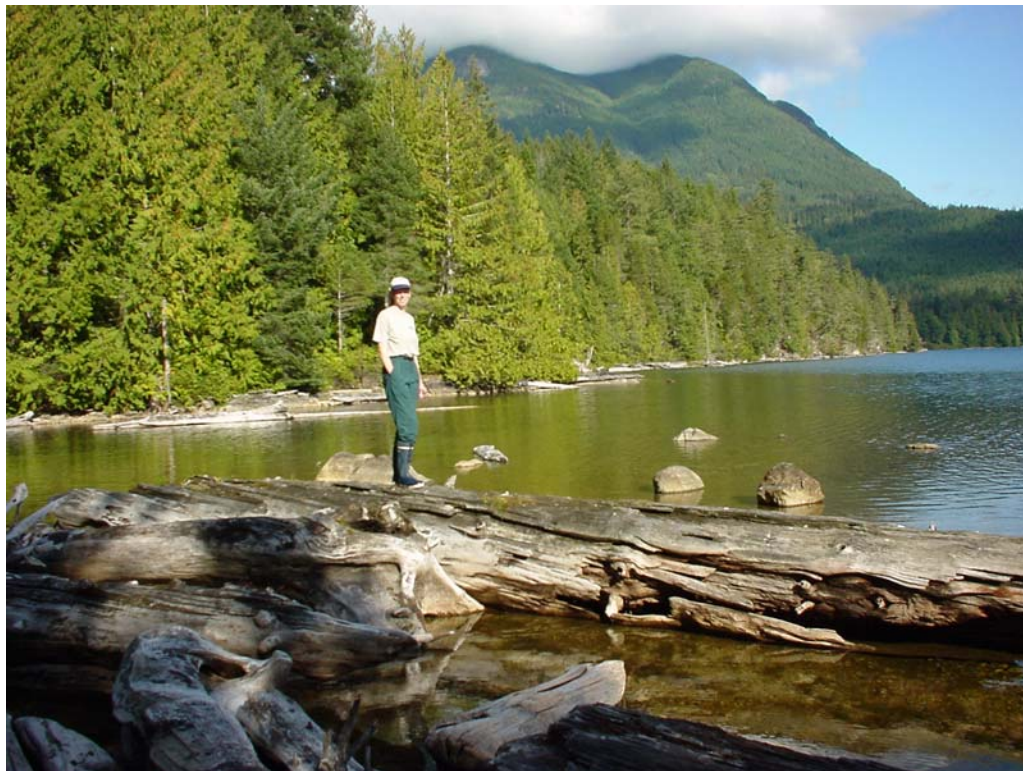
Hole in the Wall

- We left the Octopus Islands through Hole-In-The-Wall (where the current runs at 12 knots max). But this time we ignored everyone else and went exactly at slack. It was rather anti-climactic.
- We actually had a nice, light breeze and motor sailed through.
- It has been weeks upon weeks since we were able to set the sails and we were hopeful to sail into Desolation Sound, but the wind again switched to the south as another front began to approach.



Desolation Sound

- We anchored in Squirrel Cove and stocked up on much needed provisions at the store the next morning. We then headed to the famous Prideaux Haven anchorage, after a brief stop at Refuge Cove for fuel and water.
- What we like about Desolation Sound the most is all the hikes. The scenery is nice and most of the forests are well recovered second growth forest.
- What we didn't like about Desolation Sound is all the boats. Everyone keeps telling us that it's empty, in fact several of the shops and stores have closed for the season. However, having 10+ boats in an anchorage is crowded for us after months of solitude interrupted only by occasional supersized powerboats with generators.
- One thing that is surprising is the quietness. In Alaska you'd have one boat next to you, but it would run its generator all night. Here, everyone wants to escape so badly that they are all very quiet and many people actually row their dinghies instead of motor full speed through the anchorage.
- We took a few hikes from Prideaux to the surrounding bays and a nearby lake.



“Deliverance Bay”

- We traveled from Desolation Sound south to Scottie Bay, a tiny nook of an anchorage that was about 2/3^{rds} of the way to Nanaimo.
- The weather was pretty rough the last 3 hours of the trip with large whitecaps and about 20 knots of wind directly on our bow.
- We were relieved to get into Scottie Bay only to find it packed with many decaying boats. Unable to find room to anchor, but with the weather worsening we anchored just inside the entrance to the bay.
- As soon as the anchor was set, some guy came speeding into the bay in a small power boat. I gave him a wave but he ignored me and after circling our boat once, he said, “Well, now you’re stuck, better start a fire! HA! HA! HA!” and sped off.
- Looking around the bay it suddenly seemed like some kind of strange spider web for boats. Maybe these derelicts were once shiny and new until they found their way into Scottie Bay.
- I swear I could here the banjo from Deliverance playing in the distance. Needless to stay we bolted at first light for Nanaimo.

Strait of Georgia

- “Small Craft Warning for the Strait of Georgia with NW winds building to 25 knots and occasional thunderstorms...” crackled from the VHF. It was music to our ears. Finally some decent wind that would actually push us in the direction we wanted to go.
- Sailing downwind is much nicer than sailing upwind like these poor suckers below trying to sail upwind taking big sprays of salt water over the bow.



Nanaimo

- The downwind crossing was a great end to our trip. There were no thunderstorms and we averaged more than 5 knots.
- Reaching the city was an assault on our senses. The cars, roads, trains, ferries, tract housing, airplanes, smoke pouring from stacks were all a depressing site. And since leaving the Octopus Islands we had this feeling of never being alone because there were so many people & boats.
- On this trip we came to appreciate the vast amount of wild lands required for healthy ecosystems. Small towns and even homesteaders really caused a visible disruption to wildlife, especially to the large mammals.
- We also came to realize how difficult escaping human society is. Even in the most remote places we saw discarded machinery, evidence of clear cuts and trash. It was almost impossible to find places where people were not trying to reap from the sea or land for their own purposes. I only hope that people of the present and future have the wisdom to prevent the Northwest from becoming like the East Coast or Europe.
- If you want to help preserve some of this wilderness, stay tuned for our website announcement that will link you to organizations who can help educate people and protect what is left.

- As a side note, I would like to apologize for some of the poor quality of the images in our journal, but I felt they helped capture some of the spirit of the trip. Even the best images and video, however, do nothing to convey the immense beauty and emotions of feeling like a living part of the wilderness.

The End



Sarana in the Port of Nanaimo