

Prevost Island Impression

Normally when July 1st arrives we head north, past Johnstone Strait for good scuba diving, kayaking, prawning and crabbing, wilderness hikes and relative isolation. Last summer was an exception – we had to wait for our “new to us” 40 Eagle to be delivered from Portland, Oregon. Instead of waiting at our home dock in Mission, B.C., my husband, Rick and I decided to head for the Gulf Islands. We would be close to the delivery site at Steveston in Richmond when our new boat arrived.

We headed off in our 34’ Californian trawler, “Fish-n-Chips” and I tried to convince myself that the waiting would be easier if I was back out on the water. I tried not to pout and instead consoled myself thinking the time spent waiting would be worth it when our new boat arrived – even if I had to endure the more crowded anchorages while longing for the abundant wildlife, sea life and picturesque settings the northern waters afford.

We decided to head for Prevost Island, accessible only by boat with no marina – a very quiet and secluded sort of island. After four amazing days there I had a much needed appreciation for the waters so close to home.



When we arrived and anchored in Glenthorne Passage, we were the only boat there. After settling in we prepared to scuba dive off Owl Island, a small island just north of Secret Island where all the summer cottages are located. We loaded up our twelve foot inflatable, “Catch-Up” and headed for the dive spot. I’m used to the current swept waters up north that have life on top of life, so much so that you have to look really carefully to not miss anything.

I didn’t expect to see much under the water off this island – but I was wrong. There was interesting life - basket stars, many purple sea urchins, rock scallops, many varieties of crabs, one large ling cod, and a very colorful Irish Lord. The visibility wasn’t as good as up north due to the influence of the Fraser River but a good dive none the less.

When we returned to our boat we had company. Another vessel from Anacortes was anchored on route northward. Back on board our vessel, our dog, a one hundred and twenty-five pound Italian Mastiff, Kona, started barking and growling with all the hair up on her back. What she wanted us to notice





was the pending danger on the eastern foreshore from a small flock of Angora goats that were standing on their back legs eating the leaves off the trees.

Kona thereafter kept a sharp lookout for sheep and marmots that frequented the shoreline near our anchorage.

The next day we baited our crab trap and placed it towards the head of Glenthorpe. It was a bit tricky because there were commercial traps there as well. While we waited for our trap to fill we decided to go kayaking. The plan was to circumnavigate the island. It was a perfect day for it. Very little wind, sunny but not too hot. We visited Annette Inlet, one bay



eastward from where we were anchored, and saw that there was a substantial house there and two float homes and several boats anchored in the head of the bay. We passed by Selby Point and were surprised to find current there. We would check it out later for a potential dive spot. We then passed James Bay and noticed marine park signage and several tents camped at the head. We continued on around the point and down the east side of Prevost. We saw several eagles on the way and took pictures of one perched in the high trees as we rounded Peile Point. We paddled until we were adjacent to Hawkins Island and pulled up on shore for a pleasant picnic lunch on a sandy beach. After lunch we continued paddling south in Trincomali Channel and I spotted an Orca out of the corner of my eye heading toward us coming up Navy Channel across from Mayne Island.

For safety reasons Rick and I always paddle with walky-talkies and I radioed him that whales were coming our way and he immediately started paddling hard toward the center of the channel to get a good picture. I, on the other hand, paddled closer to shore! He positioned himself in the middle of the waterway and several whales passed by. He had his eye in the view finder of the camera and I continued



to radio him the whales' location as they approached. One large male came very close and he got a great shot of him. He was so close when the bull whale went past him that the waves from the animal substantially rocked his kayak and he could see the whale's eye looking at him as he passed by! As I watched from the shore I was getting steadily more nervous as the pod surrounded Rick as they swam by, not to mention a ferry was approaching to go into Active Pass. Several whale watching boats that had been following at the prescribed distance were now close by as well. As the ferry passed, one whale in the pod lay on its side and flapped its pectoral fin and its tail as if saluting the passengers on the ferry.

After the pod passed, and my heart returned to its normal rate, we continued paddling around the southern end of the island. We paddled around Portlock Point, past Richardson Bay and on to the entrance to Diver Bay.

Always on the look out for a good oyster bed, I paddled close into the Red Islets at the mouth of this bay. I then heard what sounded like the meowing of a kitten. As I scoured the shore line searching for the source of the cry, I spotted, so well camouflaged with the gray rocks, a seal pup lying alone. Had he not "meowed" I would never have spotted him. I again called Rick on the walkie-talkie and told him to come over and take a picture. I stayed well back so not to frighten the pup and as Rick approached; even with explicit instructions as to his whereabouts, he had trouble spotting the pup. Mother seal and company must have been out for lunch and would be back soon. After getting several pictures of him we continued on our way.



As we entered in the narrow gap at the southern end of Secret Island we spotted a red-hulled Nordic Tug and paddled over to admire it. The "Sonshine" was from Edmonds, Washington. The Captain and his wife were on their way up north for six weeks. They told us they anchored in this location each year. They like to anchor adjacent to the "gap" overlooking Captain Passage across to Saltspring to admire the gorgeous sunsets. I had to tell them about our whale encounter and they had to admit they had never been that close to any whales, here or up north.



We returned to our boat, and proceeded to collect our crab trap. We

were pleased with the reward when we pulled it up. Several undersized rock crabs were thrown back but two Dungeness were retrieved for a perfect appetizer after an adventure filled afternoon.

The next day we decided to take Kona for a lengthy hike in the forest at James Bay and further explore the recently acquired National Park Reserve there. On our way over in our tender we decided to drop a prawn trap just off of Selby Cove.

As we approached the head of James Bay our sounder informed us it was shallow at the head so we went in as close as we could with “Catch-Up”, lifted the motor up, and waded the rest of the way onto O’Reilly Beach. We hiked through the forest along the east side of James Bay and climbed up to admire the breathtaking view from Peile Point. The climb is strenuous at times and often the trails lead one way and then another. The trail is more of a deer path and there are many ways to choose from. The signage in the park is not as detailed as we are used to seeing in the provincial marine parks. We climbed back down and walked over to the western side of the bay and explored the orchards and meadows there. There were several campers and kayakers enjoying the site and several boats anchored in the bay.



We then got back into the “Catch-Up” and on our return checked out Selby Point for a potential dive spot for the next day. After noticing the current there earlier while kayaking we now discovered, with the help of our sounder, that there was a small reef there. Tomorrow we would dive from this point to further explore the undersea world around Prevost Island.

We pulled up our prawn trap and found, after only three hours down, there was a nice collection of shrimp to add to our dinner menu.

We dove the next day off Selby Point and enjoyed thirty foot visibility. The terrain was different here than off Owl Island. It was rocky with many crevices to explore. We saw a red rock crab holding a female tight to his underside waiting, Rick explained, to mate with her when the time was right – the molt. There were also many varieties of colorful sea stars.

After our dive we decided to take advantage of a calm sea and headed over to Saltspring in our inflatable to grocery shop. The market place in Ganges, as always, was bustling with people taking up the various offerings there. We returned home with fresh supplies of fruit, veggies and a bottle of good red wine.

The next day we went diving in Active Pass at Collinson Point – a short ride over in the “Catch-up”. Once again we found large ling cod and some interesting sea life.

When we got back to our anchorage we had a voice message on our cell phone informing us that our new boat “Sea Foam” would be arriving in Steveston next day to clear customs. Tomorrow morning we would weigh anchor and cross the Strait headed for Sand Heads.

That night as we sat over a meal of fresh seafood, sipping on our wine and watching the evening come to a close, I had to admit that our brief trip in the Gulf Islands was much



more exciting than I had anticipated. This island and surrounding area had much to offer. It reminded me of the revelation Dorothy (Judy Garland) had at the conclusion of the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. She learned that when you’re looking for something you sometimes don’t have to travel any further than your own back yard to find it.

Carol-Ann Giroday and her husband, Rick LeBlanc, live aboard their 40 foot pilot house, the “MV Sea Foam” in the Fraser River at Mission, B.C. Carol-Ann is a teacher and Rick is a Professional Engineer. During Christmas and Easter they cruise and scuba dive around the Gulf Islands and in the summer months they head north. They have been boating in the Pacific Northwest for the past fifteen years.