

THINKING OF WET LAUNCHING FROM THE M.V. UCHUCK? PERSPECTIVE FROM A FIRST-TIMER *Julie Deans*

At the end of August this year 4 friends and I arrived in Gold River to travel on the M.V. Uchuck for a much anticipated camping trip into the beautiful Nuchatlitz archipelago. The Uchuck is a working boat that services various communities on the NW coast, but also takes passengers - this part of operations is handled by Get West Adventures <https://www.getwest.ca/>. In 2023 the cost p.p., including kayak, was \$232 round-trip. Sailing time is approximately 7.5 hours to the drop-off point near Rosa Island in the Nuchatlitz, more if you're going on to Kyuquot. That might seem like a long time but the entire experience was interesting, comfortable, and a whole lot of fun. Before our trip most of our questions were answered either by the Get West staff or Siska friends who had taken this journey before, but some things only became clear as the day unfolded.

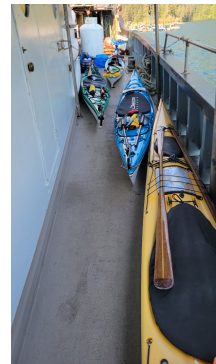
Why do they tell you to pack the kayak with everything except water?



Packed kayakers are loaded onto the Uchuck the day before the 7 AM sailing. We had been instructed to arrive in the afternoon and place our kayakers on the wooden pallets laid out for us, pack them with everything except water, and leave them there for the crew to load onto the Uchuck later. The booking agent told us that leaving the water out of the kayakers was to avoid bears coming on board during the night. Huh? The real answer only became clear once we were on board the next day (see below).

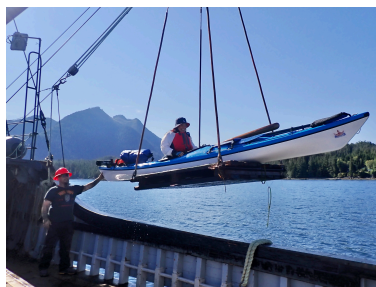
Where do they put the boats on board? Would they be accessible during the trip?

I had imagined that the kayakers would be stored on racks in the bow of the Uchuck, or some such relatively inaccessible area. Happily, that was not the case. Our kayakers were lined up on the lower deck, completely accessible during the voyage. How did they get into that narrow passageway? I had assumed that the loaded kayakers would be moved onto the Uchuck with the aid of some kind of machinery, but no! The crew MANUALLY lifted them (hence the **no water** requirement to reduce weight), and did so with only 2 people per kayak, without the benefit of lifting straps, sometimes lifting by the toggle, sometimes under arm - just as we would ordinarily lift empty kayakers off the beach onto our cars at the end of a day paddle - impressive but also a bit worrisome! If you're concerned about your loaded kayak being lifted by a toggle you might try taping it down, as it may not be possible to talk to the crew at the right moment.



How much time will I have to don my paddling gear?

The short answer is - plenty. The captain let us know over the intercom when we were getting close to our drop off point. We were all geared up and ready to launch well ahead of time. The kayakers were lifted by hand (that again!), one at a time onto the pallet normally used to lift supplies for the various communities visited along the route. After that we were able to load up our water containers etc, hop into the cockpit, attach sprayskirt, and hang on for the ride. The crew were helpful and patient with those of us who needed a little extra time. Other passengers on the Uchuck lined the railings to watch the spectacle and wave us off.



What do they do about launching if the seas are rough?

Sometimes it's too rough to wet launch in the usual area near Rosa Island, as was the case just the week before our trip. If that happens, the captain simply takes the Uchuck deeper into more sheltered waters between Rosa and Nootka Islands.

What about meeting up for the return trip?



We had camped on islands in the Nuchatlitz for 5 nights and spent the last 3 nights in a cabin at Flynn's Cove. On the morning of our departure, the owner of Flynn's Cove radio'd the captain of the Uchuck, who gave her an estimate of his arrival time at a convenient location. Had we still been camping on that last day we would have radio'd the captain ourselves for a time to be picked up, typically near Rosa Island. Getting back onto the Uchuck was as easy and exciting as the launch, just don't

rush it as I did. Take the time to line up straight in front of the platform before paddling onto it, or you may end up with your bow on the wrong side of one of the front struts and struggle to back up and straighten out, for the entertainment of crew and passengers. Ahem.

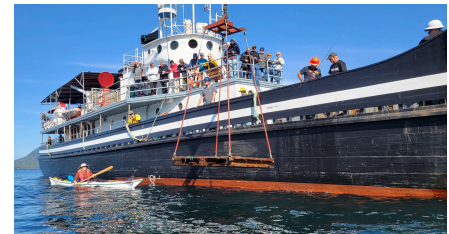


Photo credits; Tamara Plush, Lesley McCallum, Johanna de Leeuw, Darrell Howard