

---

# A Death-defying Passage thru Hole-in-the-Wall

by Dan Dunaway



And for our next act... yes, time to set out on another paddling adventure. We thought we'd ditch the Westcoast swells and sandy beaches for the tidal currents and rocky strands found around Quadra, Cortes, Read and Maurelle Islands this June. Jim, Jordan, Greg and myself made up our expedition—the third one. We all admitted to some anxiety regarding the current in Hole-in-the-Wall which has a narrow 40 minute window to get thru. Maximum flood can hit 12 knots. But Greg thoroughly researched the route, finding optimum times to transit tidal passes.



Our plan was to leave from Heriot Bay where we stayed the first night in a cozy cabin rented from the Inn. Too bad the weather had a different plan. Next morning, NW winds were hitting 25 knots with whitecaps everywhere. So, kayaks went back onto our cars; we tucked them into the ferry lineup to Cortes and went for coffee. Later, crossing over to Whaletown, it was obvious we'd made the right decision.

We spent a fun afternoon visiting with locals in Manson's Landing at their Friday Market. They have an interesting museum and historical archives. They've even started their own FM radio station: "We put the FREAK in FREQUENCY." That night we were fortunate to snag the



last site in Smelt Bay Provincial Campground. It blew all night. Next morning we drove to Coulter Bay on the west side of the island to launch. The day was much calmer, and hot! Only five miles to the campsite on North Penn Island though. Out of the four we stayed at, this was the best: an easy beach access at all tides and panoramic views across Sutil Channel from atop the bluff. Also, this was the only campsite with a composting toilet.



Von Donop Inlet had been on our radar since we began trip planning so we headed across to Cortes again to explore. Four miles or so later we reached the reversing falls. A strong flow was still emptying from the lagoon; every time we tried to paddle in it spit us back out. Well, only a few more miles' paddle to the end of the Inlet. Plenty of logging had happened here, judging by the abandoned machinery and cables. But it was scenic enough. There is a hiking trail which leads to Squirrel Cove in Desolation Sound, only a half mile away.







We went for our winebags once back in camp after a tiring 11 mile paddle, partly against a light headwind. We had company to chill out with—eight more campers. Flat tent sites were at a premium, but everyone fit in okay. This was to be the only time on the whole trip that we met other kayakers. In the morning we headed off for the Rendezvous Islands in Calm Channel. We drifted awhile, watching some whales blow ahead of us. Things went quiet,



then an enormous humpback breached right beside us—close, within 20 metres! We could clearly see its mouth and barnacles all over its body. It scared the crap outta me.

These baleen whales do not echo-locate like killer whales and other fish eaters. They are expert very low



frequency navigators that migrate over vast distances. But do they sense or even care about a few puny fibreglass kayaks? My few experiences with them says no: be wary and stay clear. We paddled on to our next campsite on North Rendezvous which



was not as nice. Long carries over a rough beach at low tide is one of the downsides to kayak camping. We had two falls on the trip, but no serious injuries. Using straps with a four-man carry is the way to go.

Our plan was to set off at 9:30 a.m. for Hole-in-the-Wall seven miles away. But peeking around the corner early that morning we beheld “Calm” Channel full of nasty whitecaps. Oh-oh... on top of a strong flood tide flowing against us from the north, this did not look user-friendly. We decided instead to go with the flow: head south into Whiterock Passage, traverse Surge Narrows at slack then paddle up the west side of Maurelle Island to our target campsite on Francisco Island. We made the ten mile journey with no problem.





Francisco is a lovely little islet a mere half mile south of Hole-in-the-Wall. So we were poised for the big plunge two days hence. First we had a cold plunge in our little bay to cool off. Then a debrief with the ubiquitous winebag and a rest while... our boats drifted away. We'd left them carelessly untethered just out of sight. Noticing a virtual river flowing past the east side of the islet, I asked innocently if anyone had checked the kayaks lately. Nope.

We hustled across to the beach to see my kayak and Greg's across the bay. He bravely stripped down to his drawers to wade out and retrieve them. Thanks buddy—another reminder for us about how fast these big tides move up here. The night passed peacefully: lots of stars, water seething past the shore, usual sounds of little critters in the bush. Next morning we paddled across to the Octopus Islands and Waiatt Bay.



This is a pretty area on the east side of Quadra Island well worth exploring. We landed at the head of the bay where sailors and powerboaters had come ashore with the same idea: a three km hike into Newton Lake. Somehow it didn't register that we were about to climb a mountain on a very hot day and lug back two heavy water bladders. The trail got steeper. Hikers passed us. Kids with their grandparents passed us. I think this was our Senior Moment. Hours later we reached the lake and cooled off. The whole excursion took us five hours.





Back at our island paradise I heated up my Poor Boy's Paella, a dehydrated dish I had concocted at home. It went down well after that hike. We took turns preparing meals on the trip, complete with appies and sometimes dessert. It made for a nice surprise each evening. But we had an early start ahead of us to catch the morning slack: up at five, off the beach by 7:20. No room for error here. The wrath of Hole-in-the-Wall would smite us mightily if we screwed up.

Earlier that day we had paddled by the entrance, curious to check it out. At a safe distance a quarter mile away there was no mistaking the strength of the current. And the sound of it was ominous. But now here we were, right on schedule, nosing our way in tentatively against a light ebb. Then Jordan ran up on a rock near shore; with the tide still falling, he worked hard to get unstuck. Not easy with a fully-loaded kayak. We did not want to be in there when the flood started.

As we paddled past the choke point and the pass began to open, we felt relieved to have escaped





while The Giant was sleeping. We carried on to Florence Cove on the south side halfway through the 3.5 mile pass and beached our boats for a snack. Then we paddled on to South Rendezvous Island, our last camp, in the same area where we nearly got schmucked by the humpy four days earlier. We saw many whales spouting on this leg. They are the true Giants of the ocean. There's no predicting when one might pop up either.

Jim had packed a huge tarp with poles and rope which was a good thing. The rain started midday, soon after we arrived at our camp. Once we had the kitchen area covered and tents up we were comfortable. And we still had wine left. Amazing! Morning broke under grey skies spitting on our drysuits and a light southerly in our faces. But we were homeward bound, back to Coulter Bay after an excellent week exploring new cruising grounds. I would definitely return.