



In Bute Inlet the shores on both sides rise abruptly, precipitously in many places, to mountains from five to eight thousand feet high

Beautiful Bute Inlet

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Photographs by the Author

SLASHING into the west coast of British Columbia there is a forty mile long arm of water which is virtually unknown. True, Bute Inlet is plainly marked on every chart of that area and may be found in any atlas, but its scenic magnificence has never been exploited.

Princess Louisa Inlet, fifty miles south on this same coast, has been the subject of many articles and is somewhat of a mecca for Northwest cruising yachtsmen. It, also, is a narrow chasm cutting between perpendicular snow capped mountains. But Princess Louisa has become almost trite with the telling and, with the erection of a million dollar lodge in 1946 at the entrance to the inlet, it has ceased to possess the indefinable charm of pure wilderness.

Bute, on the other hand, is untouched. There are but two dwellings, inhabited in the summer by solitude loving fishermen. In the winter its silence is unbroken. During

these months even fishermen do not venture up this inlet, for there are many tales concerning its dangers. These stories deal mainly with the treacherous Bute winds which sweep with terrific force down the inlet from the mountain glaciers at the northern head. (Although called Bute winds, they are probably the same type of fierce gusts that the Alaskans call williwaws.) At any rate it is said that in the winter a Bute wind can blow so hard it covers a boat with spray which hardens to ice, causing the boat to sink almost within minutes into uncharted fathoms of water!

We first heard of Bute Inlet in the early part of July, 1948, when we were cruising in the staysail schooner *Alotola*, up to the northern end of Vancouver Island off the west coast of British Columbia. Leaving Victoria, British Columbia, on July 3, we had sailed leisurely north up Stuart Channel and two nights later were moored off the little settlement of Comox. Going up to the licensed



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premises (Canadian beer parlor found in every port, large or small) we joined a group of fishermen and the crew off a salvage boat. In the course of the evening the subject of scenic beauty was raised. We put in our vote for Princess Louisa Inlet, and were emphatically over-

Alotola moored at the inlet's head. Note the milky white color of this glacial fed water and the glacier on the upper slope of the highest peak



ruled. It was declared that Bute Inlet could top everything Princess Louisa had. We then and there included Bute in our itinerary.

The next day we sailed across Georgia Strait toward Howard Island, past the treacherous Mystery Reef, through Lewis and Calm channels and, with Stuart Island to our port, turned into Bute Inlet.

However if one were going directly from Seattle, which is 240 nautical miles from Bute Inlet, the following route would be suitable. Go north up Puget Sound and through the Strait of Juan De Fuca to Friday Harbor in the San Juan Islands where American customs are cleared. Then continue north up the entire length of Georgia Strait, past Cape Mudge and into Sutil Channel which flows between Cortes Island and Read Island. Leading from Sutil Channel is Calm Channel which is about eight miles long in a northwesterly direction and about one mile broad. The entrance to Bute Inlet is on the east side of the northern termination of this channel.

It was raining by late afternoon as we started up the inlet and, having no wind, we decided to power up to the head of the arm. Our course was northeastward, with the general breadth varying from one to two miles. The shores on both sides rose abruptly, almost precipitously in many places, to mountains from 5,000 to 8,000 feet high. These peaks are covered with snow the year around. Many features of the inlet are similar to Jervis Inlet which leads to Princess Louisa, but Bute we decided



Here we make closer acquaintance with a waterfall which was clearly visible for hundreds of feet above, flowing down over bare rock cliffs

possessed a wild, rugged and grandiose beauty unlike anything else in British Columbia.

We arrived at the head of the inlet, Waddington Harbor, at 9:45 p.m. and prepared to anchor for the night. Anchorage, both along the inlet's length and at its head, takes some thought. Charts show forty-seven fathoms the entire length but it has been charted only to that depth and in most cases is over 100 fathoms. On the other hand, in the inlet's head off the Homathko and Southgate Rivers sandbanks extend a short distance and afford but indifferent anchorages near their outer edges. However with close attention to our charts and constant soundings we found a good anchorage not too far from shore. It was a calm night and an almost eerie silence prevailed.

When we stepped out on deck the next morning an almost unearthly vista met our eyes. We were at the end of the inlet with towering mountains on three sides of us. Two extensive valleys were in view, one penetrating northwest down which flowed the Homathko River, and the other valley knifing through the mountains to the southeast with the Southgate River emptying into the inlet.

Sunlight gleamed on the snow capped peaks and several large glaciers were sighted on their upper slopes. Morning fog still clung to the base of these mountains, making the shoreline invisible. It was almost as if these precipitous walls were hanging suspended over the water.

The color of the water also was distinctive. It was milky white, typical of glacial fed waters, and calm and

glassy this morning. We found it to be almost free of salt.

Taking the dinghy, several of us rowed away from the schooner to the shore close by. When we looked back at the boat she too had a dreamlike quality, for the mist still cloaked her hull around the waterline.

We found it difficult to go ashore since the cliffs descended so abruptly to the water's edge. Where the slopes were more gradual there was almost impenetrable brush, vines and trees. Never the less, if the cruising yachtsman did wish to explore the country at this head, we decided it would be fairly simple to land at the base of the valleys where the two rivers flowed into the inlet. It seems likely that good hiking could be found by following one of the rivers back up into the mountains. However we decided not to venture ashore at all.

Back again on the schooner, we discussed powering up Homathko River, since it is a stream of considerable extent with depths from one to three fathoms and breadth varying from fifty to 200 yards. Even though it has a swift outgoing current, attaining in August a rate of five knots, this river is navigable for several miles.

We found that at the mouth of the river there is a bar with a depth of less than two feet and, with Alotola drawing seven and a half feet, it was obviously impossible. For the power cruiser with shallow draft it would be a fascinating side trip.

By noon the mist had lifted and the sun was bright, but no wind. So we started to power down the inlet.

Another scenic wonder of Bute is its waterfalls. They



The schooner, nosed into the base of the rock cliff, had a convenient source of fresh water flowing past her bow



may be discerned first high up on the mountain sides like little ribbons of white. In some cases they descend through heavily wooded areas and can be seen only when they pour out at the base of the incline. But many times they come down over bare rock cliffs and are clearly in view for hundreds of feet. Often times the cliff is so perpendicular that the water falls straight down, free of the rocks, and into the inlet.

Since the chart showed forty-seven fathoms right to the shoreline we decided, half way down the inlet, to go into shore and make closer acquaintance with a particularly full flowing waterfall.

This we were able to do and, with the motor running, kept the bow of the boat nosed up to the rocks within a few feet of the cascade. It seemed wasteful to neglect such an abundance of fresh water so, with a large funnel attached to rubber hosing which extended back to our tanks, we filled up.

On our way once again it took only an hour to reach the mouth of the inlet, and in late afternoon we went through the swiftly flowing Yaculta Rapids on high water slack, leaving Bute Inlet alone again in its splendor. In the two days there had been no other boat in the inlet. This fact in itself lent enchantment to the spot. One of the crew put it this way, "No licensed premises, thank God."

If scenic beauty does not lure the yachtsman to Bute Inlet, maybe the fishing will. Webb Moffett and Charles Chrestenson proudly display some Northwest salmon