

Seven days on a sailboat might get a little boring somewhere else, but in the Gulf Islands, you have your choice of 75 destinations nearly every day.

GULF ISLANDS CHARTERING

BY LAIRD DURHAM

It's easy to find adventure in the Gulf Islands. It can even be an adventure getting there, particularly if you've never driven over the back roads of the Pacific Northwest and onto one of the colorful ferries connecting mainland lumbering ports with the islands.

There are about 75 Gulf Islands lying in a chain about 40 miles long off the east coast of Vancouver Island, across the Strait of Georgia from the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. If you aren't lucky enough to live within driving range, you can fly to Vancouver or Seattle and pick up a ferry there. If you want to get started in a hurry, you can skip the ferry and fly directly to Victoria on Vancouver Island where the most accessible charter fleets are based.

You don't have to be an expert sailor to seek adventure by bareboat charter in the Gulf Islands. In the charter season, July and August, the weather is warm and sunny most of the time. Each time we have chartered in the Gulf Islands we have been joined by our young children and by two or three other boats skippered by friends and their kids, usually for a charter of one week. To most of us, seven days on a sailboat is all too short, but sometimes long passages can get tiring or boring. Because there are so many Gulf Islands lying close together, trip distances are short and varied. You can sail through several passes and around several islands in a single day.

The most adventuresome passes are Portier Pass, Active Pass and Sansome Narrows. Four times each day the tides rush through these passes at velocities as great as 8 to 9 knots. Going with the current is the preferred way though. But one day we tried it the other way.

We had arrived at Portier Pass after a long reach south from the Flat Top Island group. We had good wind early in the day, but it diminished as usual in the afternoon. We were reluctant to turn on the engine, so we arrived at the pass late, about one-half hour after slack water, with the current rising rapidly against us. I turned

the diesel on, and pushed the throttle to full rpm. The main and genoa were set on a broad reach. We were as close to hull speed as we could come.

About half-way through the pass our speed over the bottom dropped to zero. Then we began moving backward through the pass. The flood in Portier Pass sets directly over Romulus Rock, one of the documented hazards. We could see the kelp over it off our port quarter, and it was getting closer. It is a very strange sensation to jibe a 33-ft. sloop while going backward in turbulent water at 6 1/2 knots forward speed! By the time we came fully around our speed over the bottom had doubled, we were veering away from Romulus Rock, but heading for a 5-ft. chop at 12-plus knots. The bow lifted clear at the first wave, and we slammed into the second. If we'd had timbers, they would have been shivered. As it was, our fiberglass bell was well-rung.

So we fished. Although we have rarely caught salmon while trolling under sail, we have almost never failed to score by trolling at the edges of the major passes during maximum current. This day was no exception, in fact, we caught our limit of grilse--salmon under 3 pounds--in less than an hour.

After we had limited out, we headed for Telegraph Harbor where we were due to rendezvous with our friends. Because it was late, rather than go the long way around, we took a short cut through the boat ditch which runs from Clam Bay to Telegraph Harbor, between Kuper and Thetis Islands. The ditch can only be navigated at high water, by small craft. Going through it is like sailing up a creek in the middle of a forest.

The ditch is well-marked and there are tide scales at each end, but we ran into some silting in the middle. We tied up to a couple of trees and waited for the tide to rise enough for us to clear the bar.

Going ashore is always one of our kids' favorite ways to seek adventure, especially on the Secretary Islands. These islands, connected by drying ground, are so small it is easy to walk all the way around them, yet they are big enough to seem important when you make one of them your own for a few hours.

When we go ashore it is usually to dig clams or collect oysters, both of which are plentiful enough to feed every-

one for dinner. We like clams steamed, and oysters broiled over charcoal until they just open, then dipped in barbecue sauce. When we have a dockside shore dinner like this we also usually include boiled crabs, which are easy to catch in traps provided by the charter operator.

Anchoring in the Gulf Islands is relatively easy, without the short-scope problems produced by the crowds in places like the Virgin Islands. There are many coves where we have been the only boat at anchor. But on a i boat, you should never count on anything.

One of our first nights in the Gulf Islands we anchored in Pirates Cove, one of the Canadian Marine Parks among the Gulf Islands, and usually very crowded. But, because it is spectacularly beautiful, and offers easy access to good snorkeling, we had chosen it for a night. We arrived at the cove in the afternoon, and it was, indeed, crowded, forcing us to anchor just inside the breakwater rather than in the more sheltered interior.

It was so calm we put our barbecue on the lazaret and grilled the salmon we'd caught on one of our few successful trolling-under-sail efforts. We even rigged a table in the cockpit and dined by candlelight. I got up once during the night to check the anchor. We were rafted up with friends in three other boats, and all seemed well. It was dead calm and the lines were all slack.

Then about 4 a.m. I was awakened from what must have been a pretty sound sleep by my friends yelling and pounding on the deck. A strong northwest wind had come up and was blowing about 25 knots. The wind was slowly "walking" us backward into the crowd of boats behind. The four of us, rafted together with bow anchors out, were swinging from one pair of anchors to the other. At the extreme of each swing the four boats were too much for just two anchors, so the pair would drag a little. Then the boats would swing through another arc and drag the opposite pair of anchors.

It only took a few swings for us to agree that we had to break up our raft and anchor singly. Three of us were able to start our engines, cast off, and re-anchor without more than the usual aggravation. But the fourth

boat in our raft wasn't so lucky. Her anchor had become fouled and her engine wouldn't start. She was drifting backward into the boats behind her from which began to come helpful yells such as "Put your anchor down!" and "Start your engine, dummy!"

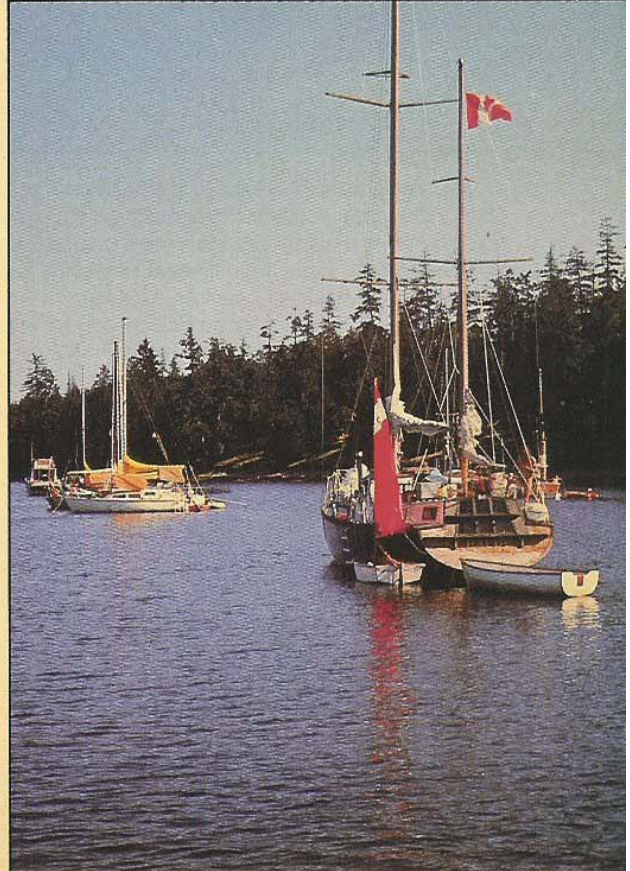
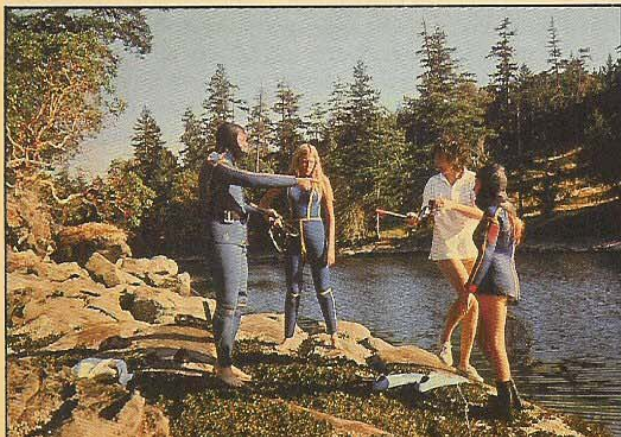
Somehow she squeaked past a couple of boats by sculling, only to end up headed dead into the largest boat at anchor, a 50-ft. black-hulled ketch with a stern cabin like a Spanish Galleon--an appropriate "pirate's ship" in Pirates' Cove. As our friends' boat spun off the ketch's anchor line the "pirate cabin" took her stern with a fender, heaved our friends a line, and made their boat fast alongside his. "I've got enough anchor for both of us," he said. When our friends came on deck the next morning the "pirate captain" was waiting for them with a pot of hot coffee.

There are dozens of marinas among the Gulf Islands. We usually alternate between anchoring out and tying up at a marina to take showers, replenish our ice, and sometimes eat out. None of the charter operators have a provisioning service except on skippered charters.

Our favorite marinas are the Silva Bay Resort and Manana Lodge. Both of these marinas have a piano in the dining room which guests are invited to play. We've always managed to slide the tables back after dinner for some dancing.

The Canadian Ministry of Tourism publishes a list of boat charter and rental operators in British Columbia, including the Gulf Islands. The 1981 directory lists 13 operators from which the Gulf Islands are easily accessible. Most of the operators are based in Vancouver, about 40 nautical miles from the northwest end of the Gulf Islands, a good day's sail. Two, in Sidney, on Vancouver Island north of Victoria, are a short taxi ride from the Victoria airport. We have always chartered out of Sidney, in part because we love to visit the city of Victoria. There are several charter operators in the U.S. San Juan Islands who offer Gulf Island charters. The advantage of chartering Canadian is that U.S. citizens don't need a fishing license; if you have an American flag boat you do, and it was expensive the last time we looked.

The British Columbia Small Craft Guide, Volume 1, gives complete information about marinas, passes, anchorages, and hazards.



Top: A sheltered harbor for the night's anchorage. *Middle, left,* charcoal grilling clams and oysters on the dock after a hot shower at the Silva Bay marina. *Bottom left,* scuba diving for crab on the Flat Top Islands. *Bottom right,* a calm anchorage in Pirate's Cove Marine Park belies the high winds that are to come, when the ketch with the multi-light stern windows is to prove a friend in need.