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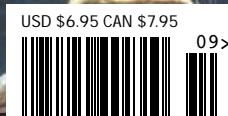
Opening Day
Lake Washington

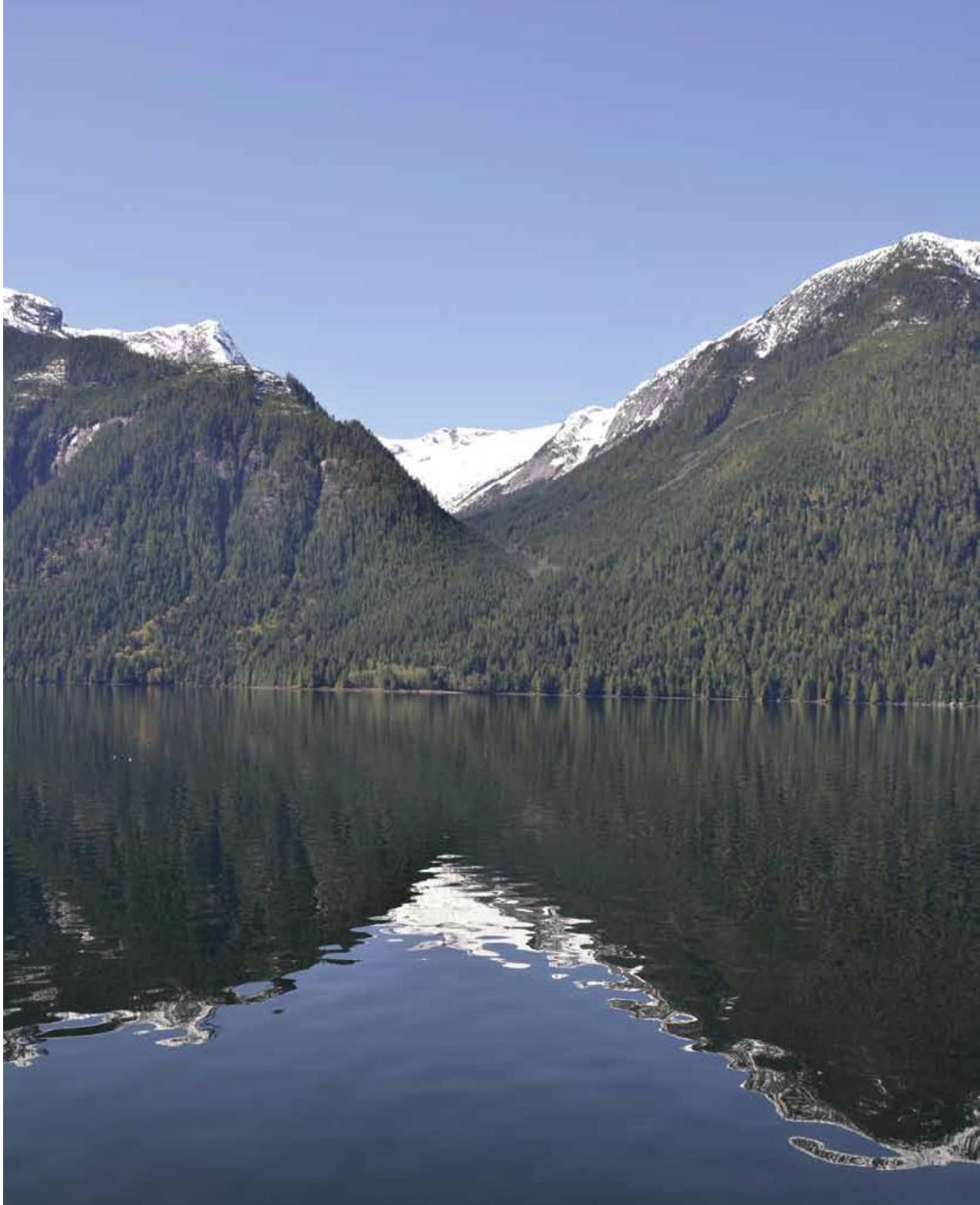
Royal BC
Museum
Victoria, BC

Harmony
Islands
Sunshine Coast, BC

Salmon Fishing
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Gunkholing Around Harmony Islands

By Jan Ross



Exploring the
Sunshine Coast

It's the quiet you notice first. Even before the lush growth of dark green evergreen trees, the granite slopes scoured by glaciers, the snow topped mountains, and the waterfalls catch your attention. It's the quiet.

As we cruised along the gorgeous Sunshine Coast of British Columbia in our comfortable Un-Cruise Adventures yacht, the *Safari Quest*, we heard a few seabirds calling to each other, but that was the only sound as the smooth, emerald water peeled away from the bow, leading us to explore these beautiful islands. We were "gunkholing" – a term used in boating circles to describe a style of boat-

ing, meandering from place to place seeking out isolated anchorages. In addition, we were seeking places to kayak, hike, view wildlife and just enjoy the location.

The Harmony Islands are tucked away on the east side of Hotham Sound, off Jervis Inlet in British Columbia. The Harmony Islands Marine Provincial Park covers the southernmost of the four Harmony Islands, the smaller northernmost island and most of the inside foreshore. There is no road access to the area so they are a boater's paradise, with warm water for swimming, snorkeling, kayaking, fishing and observing wildlife. Kenmore

Air flies charters into several remote areas in the region, where it is possible to rent a boat to explore this coast.

From tiny Egmont, where we had docked for a brief walk, we made our way up the coast to the Skookumchuck Rapids that line the entrance to the channel leading to the Harmony Islands. Dr. Campbell Balmer, a Vancouver dentist who purchased the islands in 1932, named these islands. He sold them during World War II, and in 1992, a part of the island group became the Provincial Marine Park.

The *Safari Quest* paused at the entrance to the rapids, just long enough to launch a skiff for those adventur-



Purple starfish majesty cling to rocks in Jervis Inlet.

ers in the group who wanted to brave the rapids for photos and a mild, white water experience. Hardy kayakers were riding the rapids and shouting with excitement as their kayaks threatened to capsize from the waves. The surrounding soaring mountains watched placidly as they have watched the Sechelt First Nations people traverse these same rapids for hundreds of years.

Our adventurers back on board, we headed past the Provincial Park towards the Jervis Inlet, gliding along on the dark green water, as smooth as molten metal. The water was so glassy that the reflections of the surrounding mountains, left behind when glaciers scoured their way through the countryside millions of years ago, were clearly reflected in the water, almost like an underwater world of duplicate mountains.

Harbor seals and river otters floated past, poking their heads up to gaze at us inquisitively unafraid and unabashedly lazy as they lounged in the warm sun. We heard one of the many waterfalls that line the sides of the mountain in the spring and summer before we saw it, soaring hundreds of meters to the top of the mountain, carrying snowmelt down to the inlet.

A bald eagle soared above us in the cloudless, dark blue sky, checking out these intruders in his domain as we neared the end of the channel and anchored in tranquil Jervis Inlet. It was time to explore more thoroughly, what we had seen from our yacht so the skiff was relaunched, and we suited up in our bright orange life jackets.

The quiet was again noticeable as we pushed away from the launching platform and relished the warm sun on our faces. Paddling closer to

the rocks, we could see the striations where the glacier had scored it millenniums ago.

Then we noticed the starfish – an incredible number of bright purple starfish clustered everywhere, both under and above the water. They were clumped into large and small clusters, clinging to the rocks above and below the water. Those above the water would need to wait patiently until the water returned to cover them, gradually drying out more and more until some would lose their grip and splash down into the water.

Back on board, we headed out of the channel into the Strait of Georgia, where we spotted a colony of sea lions lounging on a rock outcropping. A few minutes later, we spotted a black and white orca in the distance, silhouetted against the soaring, snow tipped mountains. Then we realized there



Orca sighting around the Sunshine Coast.



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(Top to Bottom) Seagulls in Jervis Inlet. Holding a Starfish in Jervis Inlet. Sea Lions.



were actually three orcas – a mother, young male and a baby.

Drawing close, we saw a lone sea lion in the water with the killer whales. It appeared he had ventured a little too far from the colony we had seen a few miles back and been trapped by these predators. The killer whales began to play a deadly game with the sea lion. Every time he tried to escape, they would circle around and pen him in. They could have killed him in an instant but they played a terrifying game of cat-and-mouse, possibly teaching the baby whale about hunting. For the next half hour, we watched as the three orcas circled the sea lion, driving him back to the middle when he tried to escape and even brushing up against him as they cavorted around him.

Finally, the orcas seemed to tire of that game and moved in for the kill, smashing down on the sea lion, forcing him down under the water repeatedly with their tails and their huge bodies. Each time the sea lion reappeared, it seemed to be more and more exhausted, just floating on the water, flippers trailing as the killers toyed with it.

We were equally horrified and mesmerized by the spectacle. Finally, there was huge splash as the largest orca came down on top of the sea lion and bore him down underwater.

For a few minutes, there was complete silence. From the calm appearance of the water and the sun shining out of a cloudless blue sky, you would never have known that deep under the water, the sea lion was dying. Finally, the orcas reappeared with the dead sea lion in pieces in their jaws. They swam away from the boat sounded, disappearing underwater.

We had entered the area in the quiet of nature. Now it was we who were quiet, mulling over everything we had seen as the green water quietly purled past the hull, eternal mountains looming in the distance.

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