

The  
Draw  
of  
Drüry

A retreat from the congestion of other summer cruising spots, Drury Inlet boasts beauty and solitude.



Although adjacent to the Broughtons, Drury Inlet's excellent anchorages are relatively undiscovered.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER AND JAMES HAMILTON

**W**ith the Broughtons becoming such a popular cruising destination during the summer months, finding a private anchorage can be difficult. Drury Inlet, however, is among the least travelled in the region—you're more likely to anchor alone here than most other Broughton locales. Navigation can be more challenging, but it's worth the effort—the scenery is grand, the anchorages are excellent and the diversions are many and varied.

**A DIFFERENT KIND OF INLET** Three features distinguish Drury Inlet from the typical mainland inlet. The first is its orientation: unlike most mainland inlets, Drury's head is northwest of its mouth. Southeast winds can generate nasty conditions here. The second anomaly is the shoreline. While most inlets are steep-shored, Drury Inlet's terrain is relatively flat, allowing the prevailing westerlies to whip down-inlet also. The third difference is that tidal rapids guard Drury's mouth. While not particularly treacherous, the current in Stuart Narrows can reach seven knots on large tides.

Beyond Stuart Narrows, the most popular anchorages are Richmond Bay, Jennis Bay and Sutherland Bay. These have reasonable all-weather protection and good holding. Although these anchorages are not as busy as the rest of the Broughtons, chances are you'll anchor in company. The best of Drury lies in Actaeon Sound, beyond narrow, shallow and winding Actress Passage. Fewer boaters venture here—we've never shared an anchorage.

**ACTRESS PASSAGE** Several drying rocks lie in Actress Passage. It's a clear passage with twists and turns, which makes for an exciting transit. We've passed through several times without a problem, but the passage always requires careful attention at the helm. Fortunately, it's well charted and can be safely run with care.

The passage is also interesting to explore by small craft. A motorized tender is best in case you have to battle any current. An islet at the north end of the pass makes a perfect lunch stop. On a sunny day, the flat, bare rock surface



heats up wonderfully in the sun. We lazed there in the warmth one afternoon and watched the current sweep through the gap below.

If you'd like to stretch your legs, an old logging road leads from Actress Passage above the southern shore of Bond Lagoon. This is a pleasant and enjoyable walk, with views through the trees into Bond Lagoon below. With leaves underfoot and a cathedral-like passage through the alders, it is like a country road in the fall. The road is mostly open, reasonably level and easy to walk.

**SKEENE BAY** Just beyond the excitement of Actress Passage, Skeene Bay is a lovely anchorage with a spectacular view of Mount Bullock to the northeast. You can also see into Actress Passage through the islets at the north end. The setting sun lights up the south shore in the

evening. Unless winds are blowing from the east, the cove is tranquil and still. The current from Actress Passage does not seem to reach here.

Skeene Bay is a good base for exploring Actress Passage or Bond Lagoon by dinghy, or just for relaxing and enjoying your surroundings.

**BOND LAGOON** is a classic tidal basin that can only be entered at high-water slack. The anchorage within is sheltered and tranquil, with a view to the hills north of Actaeon Sound. We spent Christmas Eve here once. On Christmas morning we awoke to utter stillness, with wisps of fog caught in the trees and a dusting of snow on the hilltops. Winter, however, isn't a requirement for solitude in Bond Lagoon. The number of gates that must be passed—Stuart Narrows, Actress



A quiet meal in Skeene Bay with a view to Mount Bullock.

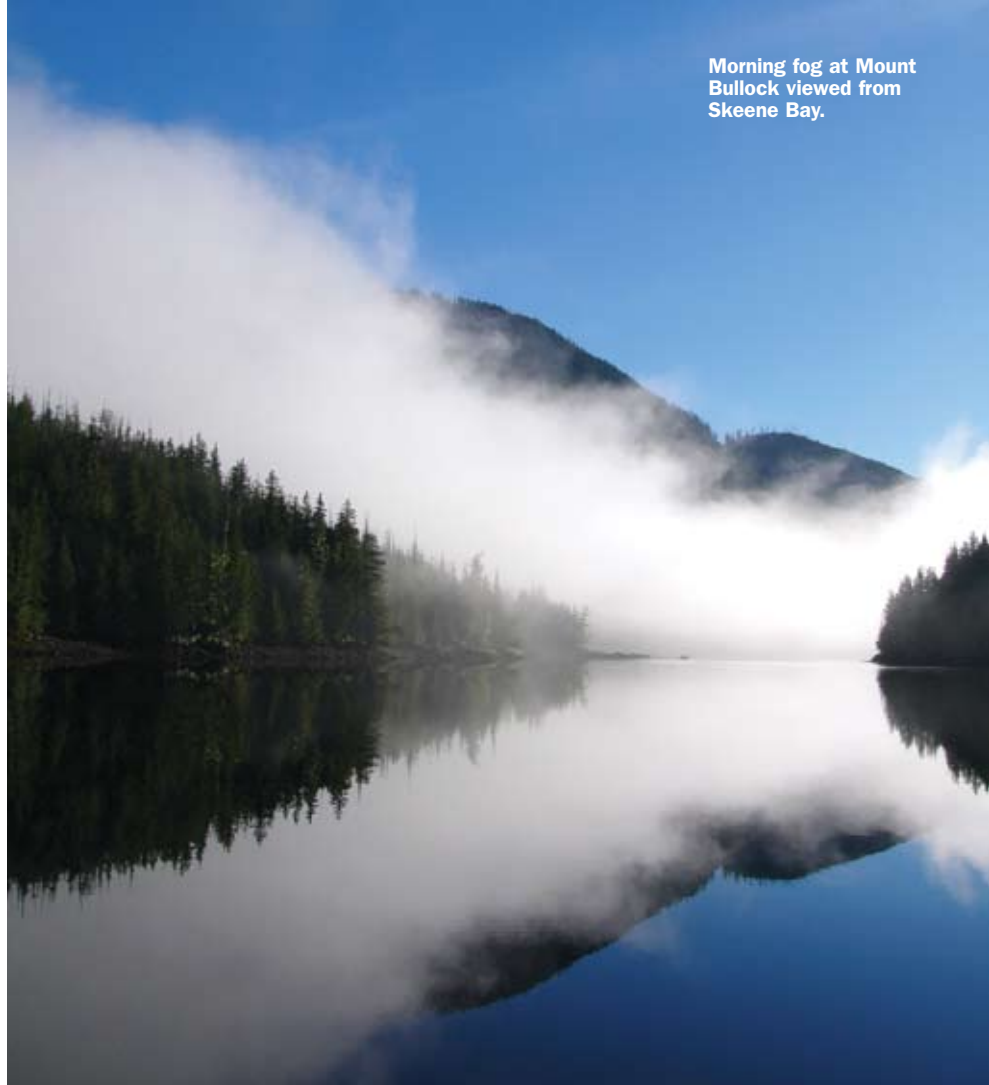
Passage and this tidal passage—eliminates most other contenders.

**CREASY BAY** Despite evidence of past and current logging activity, Creasy Bay is an attractive anchorage. Lush, thick greenery rings the north shore and a bare bluff leans seaward near the outflow from Creasy Lake.

On the west shore are decade-old ruins from past logging operations and new equipment from recent work. An old steam-powered wooden barge rots nearby and rusting machinery is visible at lower tides. A logging road leads a short distance uphill from the log dump for a good view across Creasy Bay. The going is steep, but the road is clear.

A trail to Creasy Lake runs adjacent to and east of the creek that flows from it. The entry is steep and appears impenetrable, but a quick push through the brush and up leads to a reasonable trail. The path runs slightly away from the creek and back to a marshy area just before lake opens up. Another quick push through undergrowth takes you to the lake edge. The lake is small but pretty, and makes for a nice lunch stop.

**ENGLAND POINT COVE** An ideal one-boat anchorage lies south of England Point, tucked in behind an islet with views out on either side. We like this anchorage and have stayed overnight



Morning fog at Mount Bullock viewed from Skeene Bay.



Cruising down Drury Inlet on a warm summer day.

here several times. The cove has good west protection, but might see wind in a strong easterly.

The small intertidal cove to the west is interesting to explore. An old barge was beached at the head the last time we visited. Huge stumps stand in the southwest corner of the woods—cedar

salvagers have been at work here, using chainsaws to salvage wood from stumps that earlier loggers left behind.

More old stumps and salvager's work are near the charted creek directly east of England Point. The brush looks

Water flows out of Tsibass Lagoon with such force that the basin to the south fills with foam.

impenetrable, but you can easily push through into open forest canopy. Old logging trails crisscross the woods here. One leads northeast to the edge of a small lake that looks like a good swimming hole.

**TSIBASS LAGOON** Actaeon Sound ends at the entrance to Tsibass Lagoon. Serious tidal rapids form here. Except for a few minutes of slack water at high tide, the passage into Tsibass Lagoon is unnavigable—a seething, white-water river, narrow, shallow and encumbered by reefs. The water flows out with such force that the basin to the south fills with foam.

The channel is navigable in larger boats—barely. Entire logging camps once floated inside Tsibass Lagoon in past decades and commercial craft regularly passed through. Booms couldn't be towed out, however, so the loggers sluiced them out through the rapids.



The sanest way to explore Tsibass Lagoon is by tender. We transited in our boat once, but we'll not likely try it again. Although uneventful, the passage was a little too challenging. With a four-metre beam, we had perhaps two metres to spare on either side. The worst part was just inside, where a reef juts almost across the entrance channel and the depth is least. At the lowest we read three metres, giving us less than two metres below our spinning propellers. And by the time

we'd reached the lagoon, the current had already turned to a strong ebb. This transit is not for the faint of heart.

Beyond the rapids, Tsibass Lagoon is a dramatic, narrow strip of water sandwiched between steep shores. An islet halfway inside makes a scenic picnic stop. Rusted logging loops, a remainder of long-past logging, are embedded in the smooth surface. Across the waterway, treed slopes soar skyward. The islets around the head are also good to poke about.

## IF YOU GO

We recommend an anchor buoy in most Drury Inlet anchorages—logging debris may clutter the bottom and could foul the anchor.

**ACTRESS PASSAGE** Several cruising guides contain directions on how to safely transit this waterway. We follow those in John Chappell's *Cruising Beyond Desolation Sound*.

**TRAIL TO BOND LAGOON** The path begins on the north side of the small peninsula that lies halfway between Charlotte Point and Charters Point on the west side of Actress Passage. A recently cleared logging road runs inshore in a slightly northeasterly direction. Spurs en route lead up into the hills, but we couldn't find any good views. An old logging truck service depot stands a short way along the trail. The road is older and more overgrown here, but clearer beyond. After a half mile, you'll arrive at the southwest tip of Bond Lagoon, about 30 metres above the water. The road runs the length of the lagoon and continues beyond into the hills.

**SKEENE BAY** Favour the south shore as you enter. Charted reefs and shallows

extend from the one-metre islet along the north shore. Anchor in six metres about halfway to the head. Holding is good in sand.

**BOND LAGOON** The entrance channel dries to 0.9 metres and is navigable only near high-water slack. While the channel is perhaps 15 metres wide, the course is straight and not difficult if you time it right. Run the channel dead centre. Uncharted rocks lie off the north shore, and shoals extend from the south shore.

In our experience, high-water slack at Bond Lagoon is roughly two hours after high water at Alert Bay, and the channel depth about one metre less. For example, if high water at Alert Bay were five metres at 1 p.m., slack will be around 3 p.m. with a minimum channel depth of roughly four metres.

**ENGLAND POINT COVE** Enter the cove east of the islet. Favour the south shore of Actaeon Sound until you're beyond the east entrance before turning to the northwest. A 4.6-metre reef, marked with a stick, lies off the southeast shore of the islet. Anchor in

six to eight metres with a 50-metre swing radius. Holding is good in thick, sticky mud.

**CREASY BAY** Anchor in 11 metres in the northwest corner. Holding is poor in soft, silty mud.

**TRAIL TO LOGGING RAILWAY** The trail starts at the little point of land northeast of the charted booms and northwest of the charted Indian Reserve on Chart 3547. A large logging camp has been active northwest of the point for many years. The easiest shore access is to land at the camp. If no boats are at the dock, the camp is likely unoccupied. Walk east between the buildings towards the reserve. The trailhead is at the eastern edge of the camp, right near shore, and may be marked with a blaze. The old logging trucks are about halfway to the reserve. The ruins of the railway to Huaskin Lake parallel the creek's south shore. The steam donkey is about a half mile inland.

You can also land north of the creek that runs through the reserve. Blazes might be on the bushes here as well. Push through the scrub a short distance to the trail. You will likely be east of the logging trucks.



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A massive steam donkey on a wooden sled stands in the railway corridor to Huaskin Lake.

**HUASKIN LAKE** Drury Inlet was the centre of extensive logging activity over the decades. These loggers were partly after timber along Drury's shores, but also sought the bounty around fresh-water Huaskin Lake, which lies directly east of Actaeon Sound. The loggers needed to get the timber from the lake to saltwater, and Actaeon Sound was the easiest choice.

Logs were dropped into Huaskin Lake, floated down to the western end, and then skidded down into Actaeon Sound with a steam donkey (yarding engine). In the era of locomotive logging, just before the Great Depression, logging companies even built a logging railroad to Huaskin Lake. Later, trucks carried logs to shore. The woods south-east of Tsibass Lagoon contain examples of all these early-20th century log transportation techniques.

A logger had told us of the railroad and the steam donkey ruins, but not their exact location. We'd searched the woods several times with no luck. Then one year we sat down with a topographic map, plotted a likely course for the railroad over the most level ground, and set off to search once more.

We found a blazed trail near an unoccupied logging camp. Not far along were two abandoned logging trucks. These likely dated from around the 1920s when truck logging got started along the coast. Compared to today's armoured cabs, these trucks provided little protection for the driver.

The trail soon intersected a creek. On the other side we found the ruins of a rail cart and some old track. Score! The railroad's path was clear: an unusually straight corridor that ran inshore to the northeast. In either direction were remnants of the railway: rails, spikes, wheels and carts. Little of the actual track remained. These logging railways were usually temporary—tracks and all were pulled up after a few years and reinstalled elsewhere.

We followed the railway corridor about a half-mile inshore and there it stood: a massive steam donkey on a wooden sled. The top was at least eight metres above the ground. The engine sat smack in the railway corridor—loggers had apparently re-used the old railway path to move logs with the donkey.

The first time we visited Drury Inlet, we knew we would be back. With each trip we discover something new, be it a tranquil cove, a piece of coastal history, a hidden trail, exciting rapids or a scenic lunch stop. And best of all, we've never shared an anchorage.

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