

At the **THE GOOSE GROUP:** Edge of the Edge

Explore the little-documented Goose Group and its anchorages, shore forays and dinghy trips

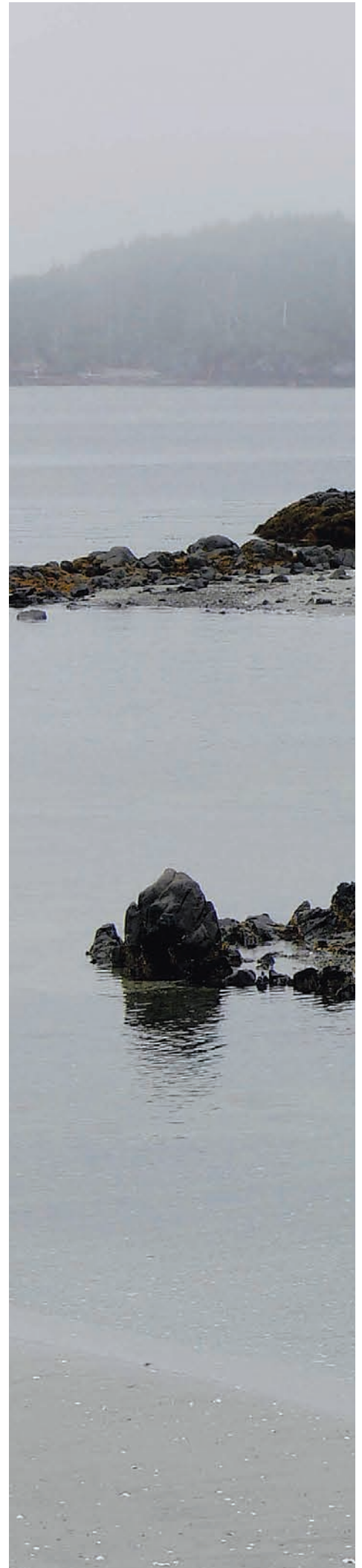
STORY & PHOTOS BY JENNIFER & JAMES HAMILTON

The Goose Group is at the edge of the edge, and feels that way. Reefs, off-lying rocks and underwater shelves surround the islands, and their low topography provides little wind shelter for anchoring. Evidence of fierce storms is visible everywhere. Stunted, windswept trees cling to land. Driftwood has been cast high onto the outer shores and fills the south-facing beaches.

What the islands lack in protection they make up for in a unique and diverse ecosystem. White-sand beaches soften the harsh terrain. Seabirds and many kinds of marine life, including sea otters, occupy the shores.

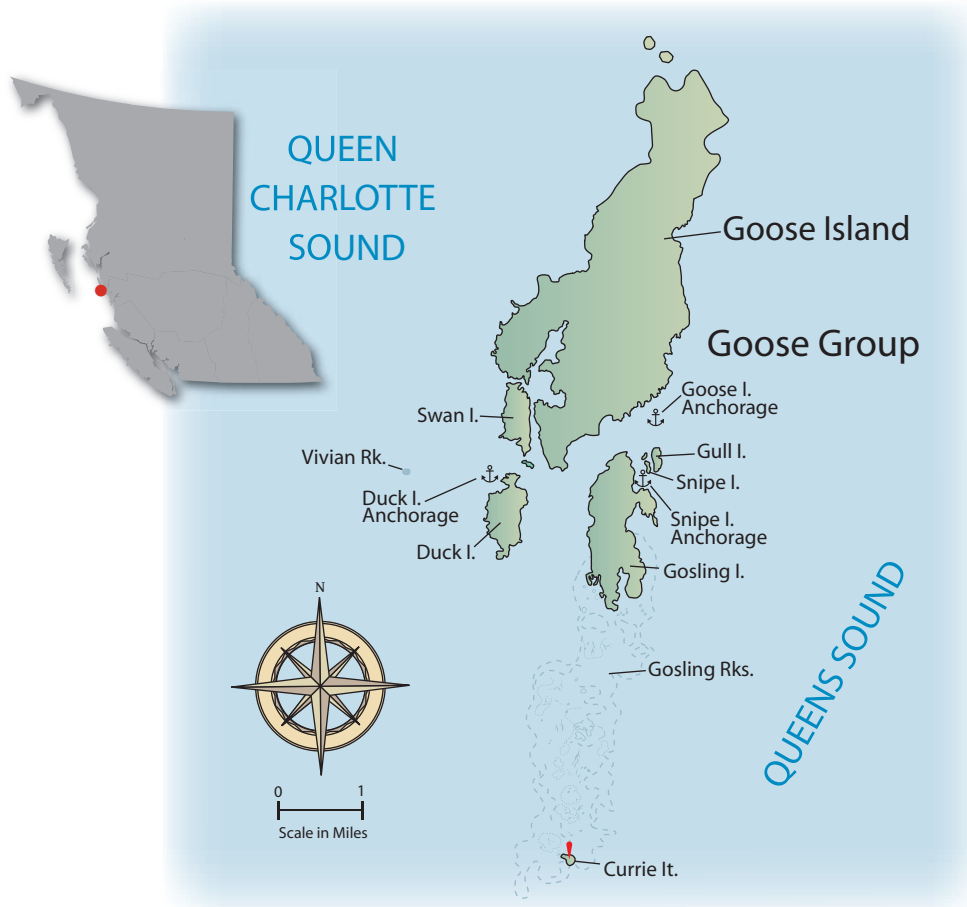
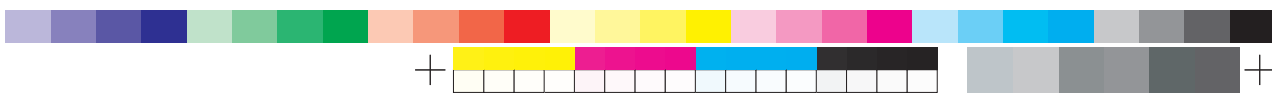
The islands are part of the Hakai Luxvbalis (pronounced *hack-eye looks-bal-ease*) Conservancy Area, which borders Queen Charlotte Sound. At 1,230 square kilometres (475 square miles), it's the province's largest marine park. The Goose Group forms the park's western boundary and is separated from the rest by seven-mile-wide Queens Sound. This separation gives the Goose Group its "edge-of-the-edge" feel.

The islands are popular with kayakers who bravely cross Queens Sound, a body of water that feels open and exposed in





Clear water and a bonsai-like tree on a small island between Snipe and Gull islands gave the place a delicate, serene feel.



and Gosling islands are one.

We walked to the islets between the two on a nine-foot tide. The structure we could see from the boat was a large lean-to with a moat. We found several campsites hidden in the woods behind, some with carefully made driftwood chairs and tables, and even an outdoor toilet complete with seat and lid. It seemed we'd stumbled onto a secret realm of the "Little People."

The "Little People" is a term for kayakers we picked up from Iain Lawrence's *Far-Away Places*. "The Little People are elusive," writes Lawrence, with affection and respect. "We saw their campsites and their fire pits years before we saw the first one on the water. They're hardy and brave, and they can fit themselves into places we could never hope to reach. I envy the Little People for their freedom and admire them for their endurance."

On the east side, a lovely basin between Snipe and Gull islands was the best part. The sand on the surrounding beaches was deep and soft, while the clear water and the bonsai-like tree on a small island in the middle gave the place a delicate, serene feel. Little wind seemed to reach there, despite the rugged seascape.

our 40-foot powerboat *Dirona*. At night the kayakers camp on sheltered beaches throughout the islands, where there are no all-weather anchorages for pleasure craft. But in settled weather, several locations have reasonable west wind and swell protection.

SNIFE ISLAND ANCHORAGE The most accessible and popular of the Goose Group anchorages is Goose Island Anchorage, between Goose and Gosling islands, but having anchored there before, we instead tried the four-metre cove on the northeast shore of Gosling Island, west of Snipe Island. The cove is open to the southeast, but has reasonable protection from prevailing westerly winds.

The anchorage was beautiful, with wide sand beaches at both ends. Despite the driftwood and evergreens, when the sun shone briefly it felt like the tropics. We were especially glad to be there, with the cove all to ourselves, when two other pleasure craft arrived to overnight in nearby Goose Island Anchorage.

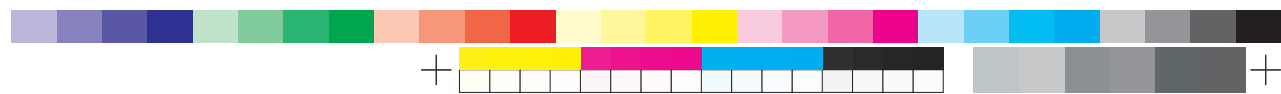
THE LITTLE PEOPLE From where we were anchored, we could see structures above the beaches on both Snipe and Gosling islands, so we set off on the dinghy to explore. We landed first at Snipe Island. The west beach there has talcum-soft sand and, as the tide falls, the beach grows and grows—probably until Snipe

THE EASTERN EDGE Conditions were calm—ideal for a dinghy exploration of the islands' windblown eastern shores. Northeast of Gull Island we spotted a sea otter.

The west beach on Snipe Island grows and grows as the tide falls—probably until Snipe and Gosling islands are one.

STEVE KARRF MAP





Above: This structure found on Gosling Island may have been one of Kayak Bill's camps, perhaps the one where he died in 2001, says Alan Hobler, mid-coast area supervisor for BC Parks.

Below and right: The beach at the Gosling Island trail's end had good beachcombing opportunities (below). All sorts of natural and man-made debris could be found, including much that seemed of Japanese origin (right).

It stared at us with its whiskered snout extended high out of the water, then vanished when we approached. The west coast of Vancouver Island and the area between the Goose Group and Milbanke Sound are home to the only known sea otter colonies in British Columbia. The Goose Group sea otters are more timid than their counterparts along Vancouver Island, where people are more common.

The east shore of Gosling Island was bleak and forbidding, with huge driftwood

logs lodged well above the waterline. It was exciting enough in fair weather, but we'd not want to be near this coast in a southeast blow.

We spent ages poking about the islets and reefs in the large bay halfway down Gosling Island. Seabirds were everywhere, along with many curious seals. A white-sand beach headed the cove at the extreme south end of the island, where an astonishing amount of driftwood had blown ashore.

KAYAK BILL We explored Gosling Island on foot as well. The other structure we could see from the anchorage was a substantial driftwood shelter. It looked as if hunters or fishers built it, rather than kayakers. Alan Hobler, mid-coast area supervisor for BC Parks, thinks

this may have been one of Kayak Bill's camps, perhaps the one where he died in 2001.

Kayak Bill was a lone spirit and something of a legend on the coast. He lived off the land and kayaked between the many elaborate camps he had set up on remote, uninhabited islands throughout the north and central coasts. Alan says he's still finding Kayak Bill's camps hidden away in obscure coves.

A trail led behind the shelter to the cove that we'd earlier explored by dinghy, halfway down the east shore of Gosling Island. The trail was open and afforded a relatively easy walk through large coniferous trees. The landscape



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wasn't nearly the open forest canopy of the mainland but was different from the scrubby, stunted trees that we're used to elsewhere in Queen Charlotte Sound. The beach at the trail's end had good beachcombing opportunities.

IF YOU GO

GOOSE ISLAND ANCHORAGE Easy anchoring with good swing room is between the five and 10-metre contour lines northeast of Gosling Island. Holding is moderate to good over sand.

SNIPE ISLAND ANCHORAGE This is our name for the cove between Snipe and Gosling islands. The cove has reasonable west wind protection but is open to the southeast. Anchor in two to six metres with a 50-metre swing radius. Holding is poor over sand and kelp. We rigged a tandem anchor—two anchors in line, connected by a short length of chain— and got good holding.

DUCK ISLAND ANCHORAGE This is our name for the anchorage off the northeast side of Duck Island. Anchor just outside the five-metre contour line. The boat will be just north of the Indian Reserve boundary line on Duck Island. Good holding in six metres. The bay is exposed to the southeast and not a place to be if a storm should come in from that direction. -JJH

We found all sorts of natural and man-made debris, including much that seemed of Japanese origin.

THE SOUTHERN EDGE We left Snipe Island Anchorage the next morning to visit the little-explored waters around Swan and Duck islands, off the southwest tip of Goose Island. While we could have passed more directly around the south side of Gosling Island, the remote Currie Islet light beckoned.

Currie Islet is at the far end of Gosling Rocks, a series of reefs and islets that extends south of the Goose Group. Even in settled weather, the area felt exposed and desolate. But only for humans—so many seabirds covered Gosling Rocks that the land was hardly visible. When we finally rounded that lonesome light on the end of Currie Islet, the constant northwest swell was apparent. The rocks provided an unexpected lee.

As we approached the anchorage along the east side of Duck Island, another sea otter craned its neck for a good look before disappearing under the surface as quickly as the first.

SWAN ISLAND Nowhere is the Goose Group's diverse topography more evident than at Swan Island. The outer coast is craggy and storm-swept, while



Visitors are infrequent to Swan Island, where grasslands and a large lagoon are home to many birds and lots of wildlife.

inside are sheltered grasslands that feel like an African savannah.

The grasslands are in the large lagoon east of Swan Island's northern tip. With just over three metres of tide, we had barely enough water to reach them through the channel between Swan and Goose islands. Birds and other wildlife were common, so we had to be quiet and still so as not to spook them. Visitors are infrequent.

A more adventuresome trip was to the islets between Duck Island and Swan Island. We landed the dinghy on the islets' sheltered eastern side and walked out for a view of the exposed western shore. Even with minimal swell, surf pounded against the jagged shore and rushed into several surge channels. Offshore, breakers crashed over menacing-looking Vivian Rock.

THE WESTERN EDGE From Duck Island Anchorage, we travelled along the west shore of the Goose Group and rounded the north end of Goose Island to re-cross Queens Sound. We ran in deep, safe water but were close enough for views of the rocky shoreline. It looked as ominous in person as it does on the chart—just what you'd expect at the edge of the edge. 🌐

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