

Draney Inlet

A Cruise into Coastal History

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER
AND JAMES HAMILTON

The second of a three-part series on cruising the mid-coast inlets of Seymour, Smith and Rivers—with anchorages you won't find in any guidebook

Beautiful Allard Bay feels more like a mountain lake than a saltwater basin.

Draney Inlet is a pocket-sized gem located north of Cape Caution, just off Rivers Inlet. The landscape is dramatic and the anchorages are scenic and protected. At the head, the serpentine Lockhart Gordon Creek makes wonderful dinghy territory. And, best of all, we found much evidence of coastal logging history, including an old corduroy road and a massive A-frame logging rig still in working order.

Although the entrance to Draney is right off the busy Inside Passage, few pleasure craft enter. We had the anchorages all to ourselves.

DRANEY NARROWS As with Seymour and Belize Inlets, tidal rapids also impede the entrance to Draney Inlet. However, Draney Narrows isn't as fierce. The maximum ebb here is 10 knots compared to Nakwakto Rapid's 14.5 knots. A transit is still best done at or near slack, though, particularly on larger exchanges.

We entered one hour and 20 minutes after low-water slack on a three-metre exchange. Although we had to steer a bit to maintain course in the three- to four-knot current, we had no problem running our 40' powerboat *Dirona* through at eight knots.

But these rapids can be dangerous. In *Afloat in Time* (Hancock House, 1999), James Sirois describes an attempted exit his crew made against the flood current an hour before slack water, when whirlpools wider than their camp boat's length



had formed. Inside one whirlpool, a 12' log spun on end. In maintaining course, the water pressure against the rudder was so high that the steering linkage parted. A crewmember jury-rigged a fix as the boat spun backwards towards shore. They somehow escaped unscathed and retreated to wait for slack. Sirois summarizes the event as "close to being an underwear-changing experience."

FISHHOOK BAY lies nearly landlocked just inside Draney Narrows. At the entrance



A-FRAME RIG Halfway down the arm that extends south from Allard Bay, we were amazed to see a massive A-frame logging rig. The apex was at least 35 metres above the water, and its float, packed with all sorts of machinery, parts and fuel tanks, extended a similar distance behind. What a find—we'd read much about them and seen smaller setups, but never a full-sized one. We were told later that this was the last A-frame logging operation on the coast.

After anchoring, we came back to check out the A-frame. The rig appeared to be in working order, and recently used. The owner had appar-

ently received numerous inquiries about purchasing it—a posted sign read “It’s all sold. Thks.” Another sign also caught our attention—the whistle signal key. Loggers ashore use combinations of short and long blasts to communicate with the engine operator—a standard safety practice in logging operations when a remote engine is used to pull out logs.

As we explored the A-frame and followed its cables up the steeply sloped shoreline, we felt transported back in time to the 1940s. Only our inflatable dinghy, moored to the float, gave away the time period.

DRANEY INLET

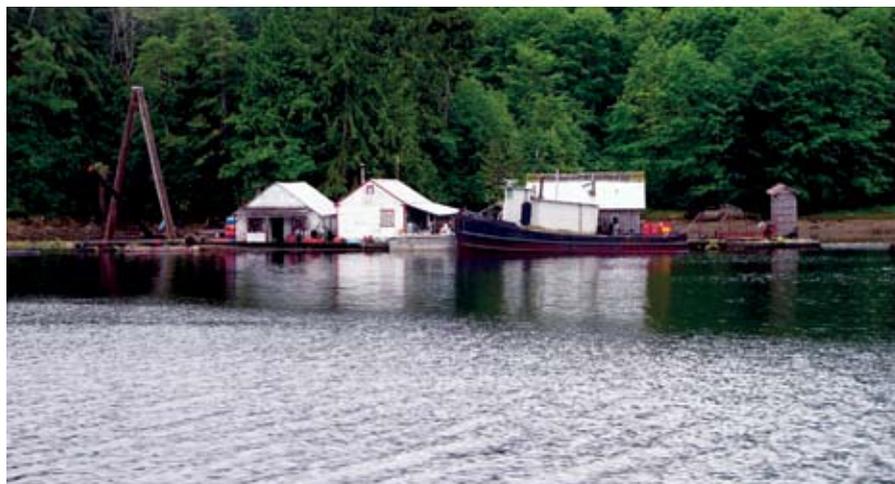
Thirteen miles in length, Draney Inlet is a miniature, more tranquil version of the major coastal inlets. The afternoon westerly winds that funnel up the big inlets don't seem to reach here. And being shallower and narrower, Draney feels less imposing. The navigation choices are fewer, too. Only one waterway, Robert Arm, juts off the main route. Once you've explored it, the only option is to continue east to Draney Inlet's head or

go back towards the narrows. The correct choice is the head—here lies the best of Draney Inlet.

ALLARD BAY Draney makes a dogleg near its head. Just before, beautiful Allard Bay extends northward. With steep mountains reflecting in mirror-still waters, the bay is more like a mountain lake than a saltwater basin. The intertidal north end of the bay looked like excellent dinghy territory. And a trail would certainly extend from the head to nearby Allard Lake. Allard Bay was enticing, but we wanted to anchor at Draney's head to explore the Lockhart Gordon Creek. So we toured the bay and continued.

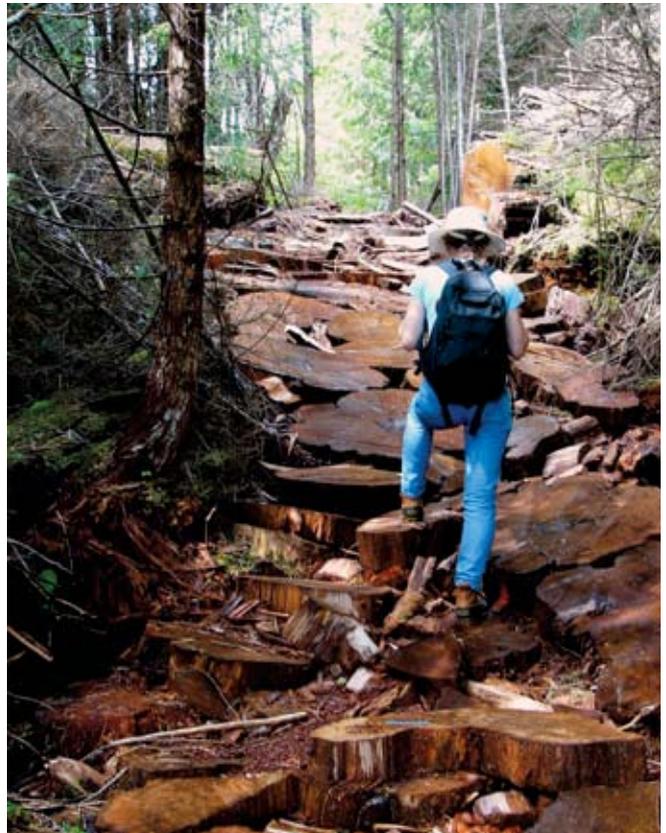
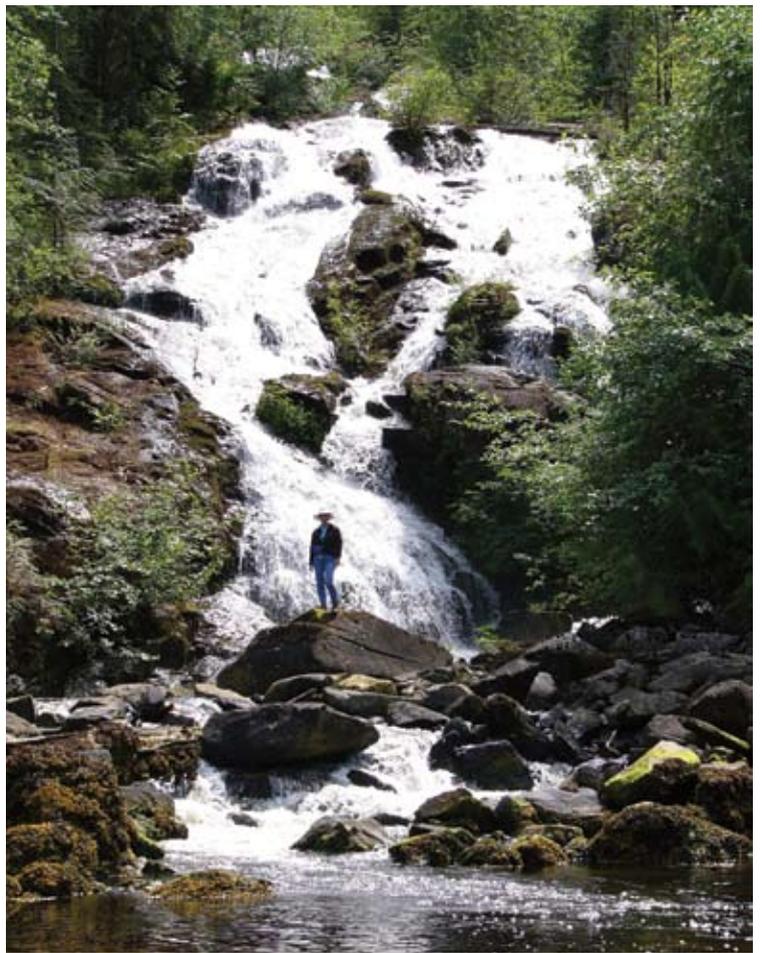
At the entrance to Fishhook Bay is a floating camp of the sort that once existed throughout the B.C. coast.

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Below: The A-frame's apex towers at least 35 metres above the water.

Right: The outflow from freshwater Caroline Lake gushes and spills 30 metres over a rocky face. Good anchoring depths are in front for that "Princess Louisa" experience.



Left: Partway along the trail to Caroline Lake are the remains of an old corduroy logging road.

Above: Salvagers have paved a steep section of the trail with large circular cedar slices cut with a chainsaw—the modern equivalent of a corduroy road.



The near shore of scenic Caroline Lake was plugged with old logs—remains of earlier logging operations.

CAROLINE LAKE Just south of the rig, the outflow from freshwater Caroline Lake gushed and spilled 30 metres over a rocky face. The falls were impressive—reminiscent of Chatterbox Falls in Princess Louisa Inlet. As well, there were good anchoring depths in front for that “Princess Louisa” experience.

We also found more coastal history

here. Poking along the shoreline, we saw a blazed trailhead and followed it inland. The trail turned out to be an old logging road to Caroline Lake that cedar salvagers had upgraded and maintained for an all-terrain vehicle. Massive first-growth stumps, ringed with freshly chain-sawed cedar bolts, stood along the trail. The loggers who felled these trees more than

a half-century ago had only an axe and crosscut saw. To make the job easier, they severed the trees several feet above their flared butts. Amazingly, the cedar in those big stumps is still valuable today—we’ve encountered several such salvaging operations along the coast.

The trail was wide and well travelled, but muddy in parts. Partway along were the remains of an old corduroy logging road. These roads, designed to prevent animals or equipment from sinking into soft ground, were constructed of closely spaced logs laid crosswise. Where the trail dropped steeply near Caroline Lake, we found the modern equivalent. To support their vehicle, the salvagers had paved the trail with large circular cedar slices cut with a chainsaw.

Caroline Lake extends southwards for three kilometres, with steep shore on either side. It was quite scenic. The near shore was plugged with old logs—remains of earlier logging operations. A modern

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aluminum workboat, certainly belonging to the salvagers, was moored here. Apparently theft was not a concern—the keys were in the ignition.

LOCKHART GORDON CREEK We anchored for the night at the extreme head of Draney Inlet. It was a wonderful anchorage, with a view west to the kilometre-high ridge beyond Caroline Lake, and little wind seemed to reach here. The only downside

was the horseflies, which were huge and hungry. These insects are common at the heads of coastal inlets.

From here we took the dinghy up the wonderful Lockhart Gordon Creek, a favourite of Ian and Karen McAllister, authors of *The Great Bear Rainforest* (Harbour Publishing, 1997), whose book inspired our summer inlet trip. The area felt untouched and far removed from civilization. Where the mudflats



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and creek join, complex water mazes lead through lush grasslands. The grass here is a bear staple—they eat it in spring and summer before the salmon return to spawn. Beyond the grasslands, the creek winds through a healthy and vibrant ecosystem. Vigilant for any signs of bears, we worked nearly two

» A-FRAME LOGGING

“The essence of logging,” writes author Ken Drushka in his classic book, *Working in the Woods* (Harbour Publishing, 1992), “involves two basic tasks: knocking ‘em down, and dragging ‘em out. Everything since...has been a variation on those themes.” A-frame logging was a means of “dragging ‘em out” popular between 1920 and 1950. These loggers used A-frames to efficiently move felled trees from steep slopes directly to the water for booming and towing.

An A-frame consists of two logs joined together with a cross-beam in the shape of a giant letter “A.” Cables were run from a winch drum at the base through blocks suspended near the apex and to a pulley at the top of the hillside. Felled trees were attached to the cable, and a steam or diesel engine retracted the line, bringing the log with it.

The whole works was mounted on a float for easy relocation. Since A-frame loggers were limited to near-shore logs, the operation moved frequently as they consumed the accessible trees. A-frame logging waned coast-wide as near-shore timber was depleted.

James Sirois’ memoir, *Afloat in Time* (Hancock House, 1999), is an excellent description of his family’s A-frame logging operation in and around Rivers Inlet and Ocean Falls from the 1930s through the 1950s.

IF YOU GO

Besides Chart 3931, our main references were Exploring the North Coast of British Columbia, by Don Douglass and Réanne-Hemingway Douglass (FineEdge.com, 2002) and Secrets of Cruising, by Hugo Anderson (Anderson Publishing, 1995). Neither covers Draney Inlet in much detail, though. In Shelter from the Storm (Heritage House, 2001), June Cameron describes her travels here with a coastal insider's perspective.

If you plan to visit, particularly if you go ashore, be aware that this is bear country. We didn't see any in Draney Inlet, likely from following the advice in Dave Smith's Backcountry Bear Basics (The Mountaineers, 1997). But we did see fresh bear droppings and other evidence of their recent presence. And bring good bug repellent. We found Deep Woods Off and REI's Jungle Juice to be effective.

To find the trailhead to Caroline Lake, follow the shoreline from the falls about 100 metres west to the first point of land (directly south of the charted 13-metre peninsula, which juts from Draney Inlet's east shore.) The trail, shown on topographic map 92 M/3, is just under a kilometre long.

You'll need a mid to high tide to explore the Lockhart Gordon Creek. Three metres at Bella Bella will do.



The serpentine Lockhart Gordon Creek at Draney's head makes wonderful dinghy territory.

kilometres upriver before the shallows turned us back.

Draney Inlet's natural scenery and protected anchorages more than compensated for the work of timing a transit through Draney Narrows. And the encounters with coastal history made Draney Inlet a real stand-out. We left the waterway feeling that this would be our favourite locale of the

trip. But we were wrong—Achlakerho Channel in Smith Inlet won that title. Learn why in next month's issue.

Jennifer and James Hamilton are correspondents for the Waggoner Cruising Guide and regular contributors to Pacific Yachting. Between them, they have logged more than 30,000 miles cruising year-round throughout British Columbia and Washington. ●

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