

SPIDER ANCHORAGE

Cruising the "Air Force" Group

Find peace and solitude in
the now-dichotomous
islands whose names were
borrowed from World War II
fighter planes

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY
JENNIFER & JAMES HAMILTON**

Protected anchorage and lovely views of Kildidit Sound can be found in Kittyhawk East Cove in the Kittyhawk Group.



FIGHTER PLANES & FEATURE NAMES

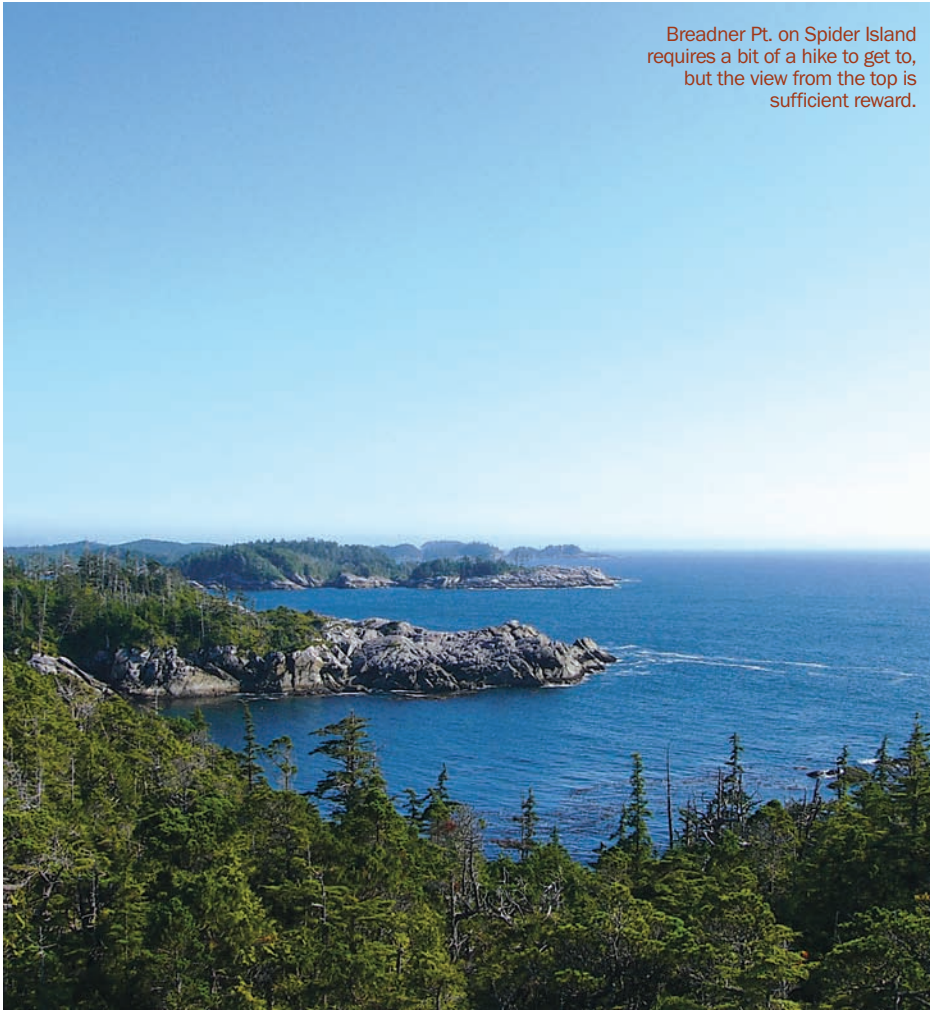
The islands south of Spider Anchorage, from Typhoon Island southeast to Kidney Island, form the Breadner Group. The “Air Force Group” would be an appropriate name for the islands to the north since most of the feature names—Kittyhawk, Spider, Hurricane and Spitfire—come from air force planes. During World War II, the Canadian Air Force patrolled the coast from a base 25 miles away at Shearwater, on Denny Island. To orient themselves, the pilots named many of the unnamed geographical features after fighter planes. The name Breadner also goes back to the World War II air force presence. Both the Breadner Group and Breadner Point on Spider Island were named for Air Marshall L.S. Breadner, chief of air staff in 1943.

KITTYHAWK GROUP Several passages, ranging from easy to tricky, lead from Queens Sound and Kildidit Sound into Spider Anchorage. The easiest entry is

Spider Anchorage and the surrounding islets make up the heart of the Hakai Luxvbalis (pronounced *hack-eye looks-bal-ease*) Conservancy Area at the edge of Queen Charlotte Sound. The complex waterways, sheltered anchorages, amazing scenery and diverse ecosystem are popular with pleasure boaters, kayakers and scuba divers. Popular, however, is a relative thing. A busy day in the waters around Spider Anchorage sees perhaps a half-dozen pleasure craft. We never tire of exploring the area and are always able to anchor alone.

STEVE KARP MAP

Breadner Pt. on Spider Island requires a bit of a hike to get to, but the view from the top is sufficient reward.



from Queens Sound through Fulton Passage. From Kildidit Sound, most boats enter through Brydon Channel. We instead prefer the route through the Kittyhawk Group. Besides fewer hazards, it has another advantage: If we get tired halfway through, we're in a great anchorage. Kittyhawk Cove, the large protected basin at the center of the group, has good anchoring depths and holding, and the sheltered channels are ideal for explorations by dinghy or kayak.

While not as protected, another good anchorage is Kittyhawk East Cove off the eastern side. The cove has views into Kildidit Sound through several gaps between the surrounding islets. Once, while at anchor, we watched a sailboat cruise between the Mosquito Islets and the Kittyhawk Group, then into Brydon Channel. It was only the second pleasure craft we'd seen in as many days.

HURRICANE ISLAND Hurricane Anchorage, the large circular basin at the southwest end of Hurricane Island, is the most well-documented—and, therefore,

popular—anchorage in the region. The basin has good wind protection and plenty of space; the only downside is that other boats will probably be there. We anchored there alone once and toured Spider Anchorage proper by dinghy. The

complexity and beauty of the region really comes out in a small craft. Islets surround the basin, with dinghy and kayak-sized channels throughout.

In the Stopper Group we found a tiny bare islet that made an excellent picnic stop. The sun-warmed rock had a 360-degree view, and colourful underwater life was visible all around through the clear water.

Two sailboats were preparing to raft when we returned to the anchorage. Preferring solitude, we left to anchor off Brydon Anchorage, the head of the inlet that juts northward into Hurricane Island. The anchorage had an amazing view to the south under a clear blue sky, and our only cove mates were the huge sea blubber jellyfish that drifted slowly by.

SPITFIRE CHANNEL, which separates Spitfire and Hurricane islands from Hunter Island, is the northern route from Kildidit Sound into Spider Anchorage—and the most challenging. The difficult part is the narrows midway along Hurricane Island where the navigable channel is perhaps seven metres wide with a depth of two metres at zero tide. Our powerboat *Dirona* has a beam of just over four metres—we could almost touch the trees on each side when passing through.

Good anchorage is at Spitfire West Anchorage, the head of the inlet on Hurricane Island directly west of the narrows, and at Spitfire North Anchorage,

Hurricane Anchorage is the most well known anchorage in the area, but there's plenty of space to share.



Narrow Spitfire Channel, between Spitfire and Hurricane islands, is well-suited to dinghy exploration.



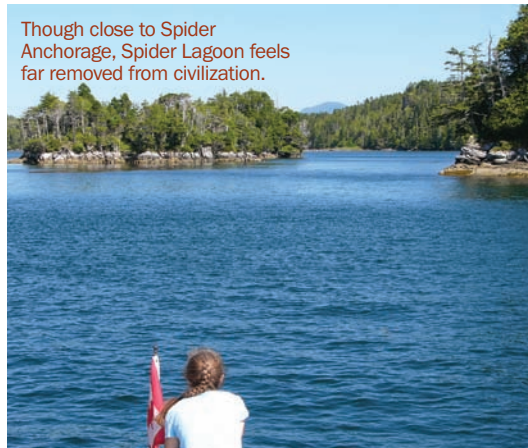
“ THE COMPLEXITY AND BEAUTY OF THE REGION REALLY COMES OUT IN A SMALL CRAFT. ISLETS SURROUND THE BASIN, WITH DINGHY AND KAYAK-SIZED CHANNELS THROUGHOUT. ”

the basin a little farther west, off the south end of Hunter Island. Our favourite Spitfire Channel anchorage is Spitfire Lagoon, the lagoon off Spitfire North Anchorage. These anchorages may be reached from the west end of Spitfire Channel so that passages through the narrows can be saved for the dinghy.

The entrance to Spitfire Lagoon dries and is navigable only on a half-tide or higher. Entry requires care, but inside is a tranquil, well-protected anchorage with good holding and plenty of swing room. A freshwater lake as big as the lagoon drains into the head through a smaller lake (shown as a drying lagoon on Chart 3937). We couldn't find an easy way to reach the larger lake, but a brief scramble over some fallen trees brought us to the attractive smaller lake. Large boulders lakeside made comfortable perches to relax and enjoy the tranquil scene.

SPIDER ISLAND On Spider Island, the World War II history of these islands includes the substantial ruins of the

Though close to Spider Anchorage, Spider Lagoon feels far removed from civilization.



1940s radar station at Breadner Point. The Royal Canadian Air Force built it, and 10 other stations, to provide radar surveillance of the Pacific Coast during the war. The stations closed in 1945 when the war ended, but a small contingent remained at Spider Island to maintain an aircraft radio signal. At times, more than 70 people were stationed at Spider Island, where facilities included 12 buildings, two docks and a 3.5-kilometre road running from the northeast corner of the island to Breadner Point.

Spider Lagoon, the large lagoon that

RESOURCES

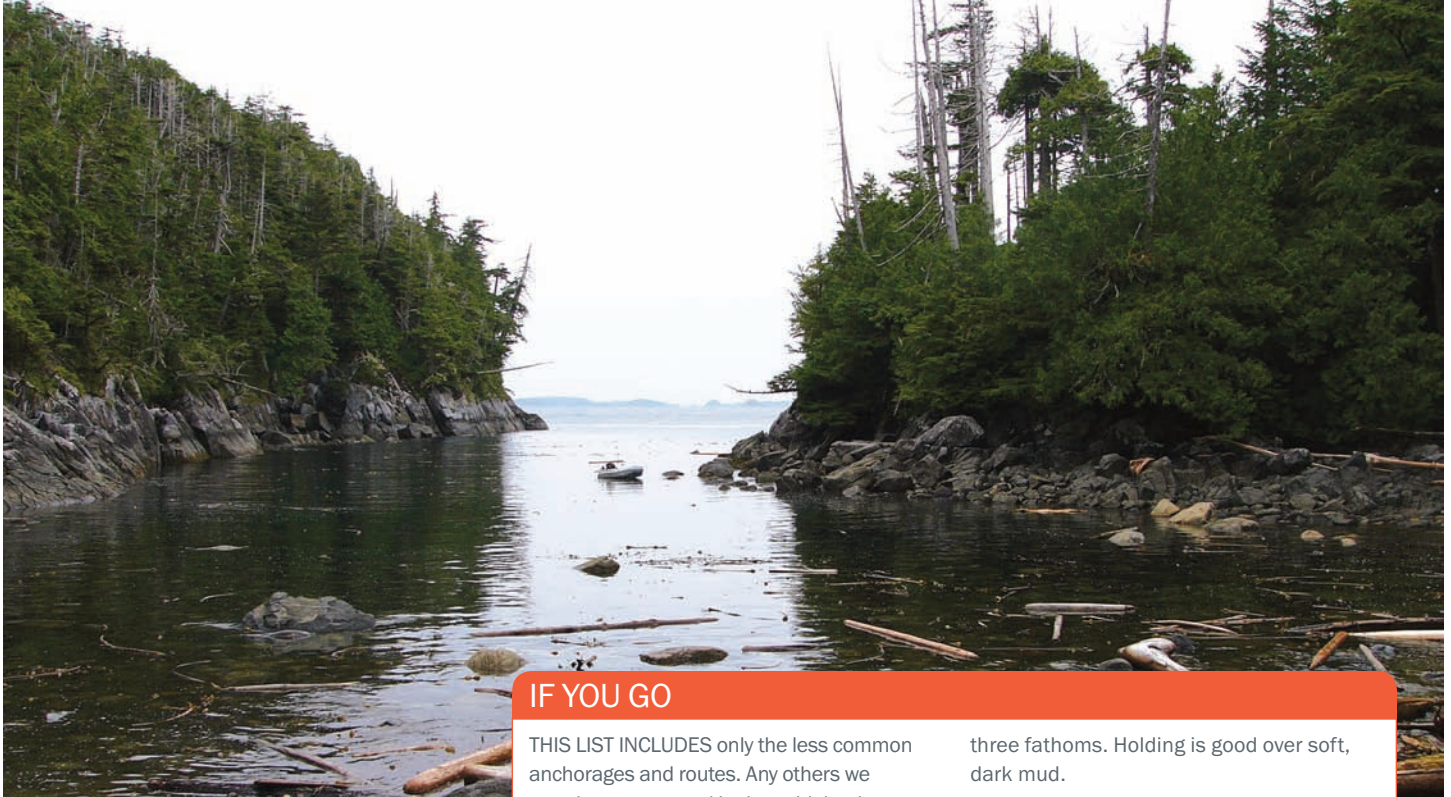
CRUISING GUIDES Several cruising guides cover the Spider Anchorage area, including: the annual *Waggoner Cruising Guide*, *Far-Away Places* by Iain Lawrence, and *Exploring the North Coast of British Columbia, 2nd Ed.* by Don Douglass and Réanne Hemingway-Douglass.

GETTING THERE Spider Anchorage and the Hakai Luxvbalis Conservancy Area are north of Vancouver Island, across an open ocean stretch of Queen Charlotte Sound. See the current *Waggoner Cruising Guide* for crossing advice.

SPIDER ISLAND For historical pictures and details about the Spider Island station and Canada's other coastal radar stations, see www.pinetreeline.org and www.peterewart.ca/bio.php?ch=spider-island. For Spider Island tours, see www.shearwater.ca/eco_adventures/spider_island.htm.

indents Spider Island from Fulton Passage, makes a good anchorage and base for exploring the island. Although close to Spider Anchorage, the basin feels removed from civilization. At high tide,

To access Breadner Pt. at low tide, dinghy into the north cove on the east side of the point.



IF YOU GO

THIS LIST INCLUDES only the less common anchorages and routes. Any others we mention are covered in the guidebooks.

KITTYHAWK GROUP Enter from Kildidt Sound between Manley Island and the Kittyhawk Group. Run north through the channel along the east shore of the 58-metre island. The waterway is wider and easier than the chart indicates, with a least depth of six to eight metres.

Kittyhawk East Cove is off the northwest tip of the 79-metre island at the east side of the Kittyhawk Group. Enter from the south, between the 50 and 79-metre islands. The bottom is deeper than charted. Anchor in 14 metres with a 50-metre swing radius. Holding is moderate over mud, sand and shell. The cove has reasonable northwest wind protection, but some gusts do reach in through the gaps. Southeast winds would certainly blow through.

SPITFIRE CHANNEL We went through on a four-metre tide, two hours after a five-metre high tide at Bella Bella. Depths were six metres and the current was slack. The entrance to Spitfire Lagoon (our name) dries half a metre; enter only at half-tide or higher. Approach on a northwest course from directly south of the 12-metre islet. Leave the islet close to starboard. When abeam of the trees on the islet, turn to the north and run until depths increase. Reefs are northwest of the islet and off the west shore. Anchor anywhere inside the basin in

three fathoms. Holding is good over soft, dark mud.

SPIDER ISLAND Spitfire Lagoon is our name for the large lagoon that indents Spider Island from Fulton Passage. The entrance channel dries 0.6 metres; half-tide or higher is needed. Enter mid-channel between the shorelines until near the drying section. The drying portion is about 25 metres wide with a flat bottom and no hazards, although kelp may fill the entrance. If the reef on the southeast side is showing, run halfway between the reef and the islet to the northwest. Otherwise, run 15 metres off the treeline of the northwest islet.

Midway into the lagoon a 2.2-metre reef off the west shore extends farther into the waterway than the chart indicates. Favour the islet opposite the reef, and anchor at the head of the lagoon in four to six metres; excellent holding in thick mud.

SPIDER ISLAND ROAD The road starts southwest of a half-metre rock off the northeast shore of Spider Island at GPS position 51° 51.39' N/128° 14.53' W. Fellow *Waggoner* correspondents Gil and Karen Flanagan told us that anchorage is possible off the rocky beach in 10 to 20 metres if the anchor will set through the kelp, and that some swell is present.

Note: Since our last visit, we have learned that the property containing the trailhead and the large lake to its west is privately owned. Access may be restricted in the future. —JJH

the mast of a boat heading through Fulton Passage was our only glimpse of other boaters during our entire time there.

The station is a bit challenging to reach, but the reward is a sweeping view across Queens Sound and interesting ruins to explore. The easiest way to reach the ruins is from the beach southeast of Breadner Point. The crescent-shaped beach has soft sand and views to Typhoon Island, and is an attraction on its own. Beach access requires a high tide, as the area dries a long way out.

At low tide, we instead landed northeast of Breadner Point and walked across the isthmus. A blaze marked a trail to the remains of a bridge that carried the old road over a boggy area and up towards the cliffs at Breadner Point.

We clambered on and followed the route up and into the brush. Thick growth obscured the road—we had to just pin our ears and push through. After about 300 metres, we reached a small clearing with a building on the left. The building was the old generator room. Inside were three cement pads with matching wall openings. The structure appeared carefully and professionally built—just what you'd expect from the military.

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The road continued west, past a raised platform, to a several-room building in shambles that we believe was the barracks for the radio and radar operators. Inscriptions written on the walls with drywall chalk recorded decades of past visitors. We added ourselves to the list.

The brush opened up behind the buildings—we were on the edge of the bluff at Breadner Point. Here was a substantial concrete support with



Concrete, pyramid-shaped extensions found behind the station.



Time and the elements have taken their toll on the road leading to the World War II radar station on Breadner Pt.

pyramid-shaped extensions on each corner, perhaps for the radar or a large gun. One reason that the military built a station here became abundantly clear. The site has a clear and unimpeded view across Queens Sound to the Goose Group and beyond. A better lookout would be difficult to find.

We had earlier tried reaching the ruins from the road across the island. A float marked the trailhead at the northeast corner of Spider Island. Working briefly through some thick brush, we found the old plank road in a clearing by a bog north of the large oval-shaped lake.

We hiked briskly along the roadway



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This building at the station may have been the barracks for the radar and radio operators.

for an hour to a point southwest of the 76-metre hill east of Breadner Point. The road was solidly built, with bridges in several places where the land was uneven or steep. Large nails stuck up everywhere. It's clear why the rest of the country was rationing metal during

the war—the military did not hold back on nails for its projects. One quarter of the route was through thick brush where the wood plank road has almost completely rotted away. The brush alternated with open bog, where the road was more obvious and the

going a little easier. Conditions in the open sections were surprisingly desert-like: hot and dry with little wind. We were glad to be wearing hats and carrying plenty of water.

Beyond the 76-metre hill, the road descended to the isthmus through almost impenetrable brush and boggy terrain. We turned back, climbed the hill, and consoled ourselves with the sweeping view from the top. The hike was strenuous, but the view was sufficient reward.

Spider Island and the radar station ruins can also be explored by day tour from Shearwater Resort.

The northern half of the Spider Anchorage area is but a small sampling of the Hakai Luxvalis Conservancy Area and Queen Charlotte Sound. The entire region is packed with wonderful anchorages, amazing vistas, vibrant sea life and, best of all, solitude. The region is our favourite cruising ground—we find new anchorages and interesting side trips on every visit. 🗺️

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