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# EDITOR'S CORNER

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## THANKS FOR THE ARTICLES!

Zilch!! – thanks, Georgia, for supplying the 'Killers' article. This trip is now on my 'hit list' and I'm looking to take up Sea Kayaking

**DON'T FORGET THE WEB SITE** – the event list is kept up to date and the notice board, trip reports, etc. are there for you to fill !

[www.ringwood.canoe.btinternet.co.uk](http://www.ringwood.canoe.btinternet.co.uk)

+ - the photos are in colour – by the time this has been through the photo-copier it loses so much!!

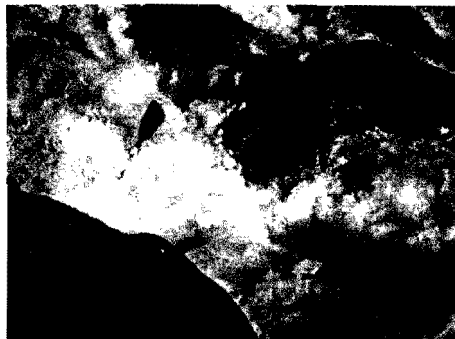
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**[HTTP://WWW.RIVERSACCESS.ORG](http://WWW.RIVERSACCESS.ORG)**

Have you visited the BCU's river access web site yet/recently. It has been updated and everyone should at leaset visit the site to 'Log' their support and to report any 'Access Incidents'. The BCU seem to gradually be getting their act together

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## CAPTION COMPETITION



Up Periscope

Visit the web site for the Caption Competition

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## FOR SALE

Kendo Evolution – a long history but you won't find a stronger boat – would outlast any of you!! £150. Photo on the web site. A good general purpose 'River Runner' that would suit any paddler up to 6' tall (Contact Graham)



# CANEWS

*June 2005*

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## GROUP RESCUED AFTER KAYAKS CAPSIZE

NICKED FROM THE SCOTSMAN - THIS ALL  
HAPPENED IN POOLE HARBOUR!!

By LESLEY RICHARDSON, PA

An investigation is under way after 10 adults on a team leadership course were rescued when their kayaks and a rescue boat capsized today.

A group of eight adults had gone out into Poole Harbour in two Canadian kayaks with a small rescue boat containing two instructors from Brenscombe Outdoor Centre, near Corfe Castle in Dorset, this morning.

The group were all from the same firm and were on a five-day residential team leadership course.

Portland Coastguard were alerted at 11am after the Furzey Squirrel, a BP supply vessel, rescued the 10 people from the water.

The group were taken ashore by the RNLI before ambulances took them to hospital. Two of the group were believed to have suffered from mild hypothermia, while others were suffering from asthma.

Andrew Jenkins, watch manager at Portland Coastguard, said: "The rescue vessel which accompanied the two canoes was a 12 foot fibreglass rescue boat with two instructors.

"There was no radio nor flares on board the rescue boat, and this vessel also rolled over losing their only form of communication which was a mobile phone when they were trying to pull people on board.

"It seems they had tried to instigate their own rescue by phoning their local office, and rescue boats would have then gone

out from Ridge Wharf which was at least an hour away.

"All the vessels sank, as did all their equipment. The instructors were also pitched into the water."

He added: "Fortunately no one has been seriously hurt but we will be looking at how risk assessments have been undertaken for this trip." The Marine Accident Investigation Branch has begun an investigation.

Tim Hughes, manager at Brenscombe Outdoor Centre, said all eight adults had resumed their five-day residential course, which began on Sunday evening.

He said all 10 people had been wearing weatherproofs and buoyancy aids.

He added: "It is a question of judgement on the day. It's not as if every canoe trip has to have a rescue boat. We are trying to match the facilities we have to the conditions."

Mr Hughes said the boats became "swamped" because the water was "choppy"

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## KAYAKING WITH KILLERS

The article on Orca's is written by a client of a company I work for, and a trip that I guided for 4 summers. It may be of interest to members.

Georgia

*Vancouver Island's Johnstone Strait is the best place on the planet to view killer whales in the wild. While powerboat-fuelled whale-watching companies are strung all along the channel, TIM WARD chooses instead to slip into a sea kayak with his 14-year-old son in search of more intimate encounters*

By TIM WARD

Saturday, April 2, 2005 Page 11

### JOHNSTONE STRAIT, VANCOUVER ISLAND -

The bull orca looked like it was headed straight for our kayaks, cruising at about five knots. "Everybody get the kayaks into a raft formation," yelled our guide Krista Bogen. "Splash your paddles so he hears that we're here!" You can tell you are getting your money's worth when Sea to Sky's guides -- usually so congenial and keen on group decisions -- start barking orders. We clung to each other's boats, about a kilometre off the northeastern shore of Vancouver Island and just three days into our expedition along Johnstone Strait, feeling very tiny. The bull surfaced again. We could tell he was a male by his huge dorsal fin -- females' fins are curved and much shorter -- that rose straight up like a large black blade, way bigger than Jaws'. Of course, he was at least three times longer than the largest great white shark -- orcas sometimes eat great whites.

"Khwooff!" the blast of his blowhole was as loud as a geyser. Two dolphins swam and leaped by the side of his head. The bull orca passed just in front of us, about 25 metres out -- the length of a tennis court -- surfacing straight ahead, so close we could see the white patch by his eye, the greyish tinge of his back, and follow the whole graceful black and white curve and arc of him, from nose to tail, as he dove again.

The nine of us -- two B.C. guides, three Torontonians, two Brits, my 14-year-old son, Josh, and I -- were so excited and focused that we did not notice that a second male orca was approaching the rear of our group until we heard his "khwooff!" He charged through the water just 10 metres out, passing us about the length of two kayaks away.

Johnstone Strait is the best place on the planet to view killer whales, also called orcas, in the wild. Orcas range through most ocean waters, but during summers in Johnstone Strait, their numbers are so concentrated that visitors are virtually guaranteed to see them. Janet Boxwell, our second guide, said she hadn't seen whales this close in three summers guiding here.

From July to November, about 200 "resident" orcas swim in the northern coastal waters of British Columbia, where salmon, their main food, is plentiful. But Johnstone Strait has a special draw for these highly intelligent and social creatures. They pull themselves onto the pebble beaches at Robson Bight, near the north end of the strait, and rub themselves on the rough stones, as if enjoying a luxurious body scrub. This day-spa for orcas is so popular that it has been designated by the B.C. government as the Michael Bigg Ecological Reserve, a no-tourist zone that keeps the whale-peeping humans at a discreet distance.

Several whale-watching companies that take tourists out in powerboats for a few hours have sprung up along Johnstone Strait in the past decade to take in the show. For those seeking a water-level view of the orcas, and a genuine wilderness experience, a handful of companies run kayaking trips in the area, including Sea-to-Sky, the outfit Josh and I chose for our six-day expedition last August.

Since the year Josh turned 5, he and I have taken a wilderness trip together each summer through northern British Columbia. Transplanted Canadians, we now live in Maryland and our B.C. vacations remind Josh of his roots, and keep me connected to the part of my country I love best. We've done river rafting, camping and canoeing. Last summer, I figured Josh, at 14, was old enough to try sea kayaking.

He quickly adapted to the trip -- powering through the waves like a motor when we needed speed in our two-person kayak -- and fit in with the group of adults. He joked with one of the Brit paddlers, an ex-riot-control bobby who left Britain to take a job as a policeman in Bermuda, and I caught him deep in conversation with Bogen -- a high-school English teacher when she's not paddling -- talking about the nature of education.

While anyone can paddle in Johnstone Strait, there are at least two good reasons to go with guides.

First, kayakers have to know how to stay out of the way of power boats, commercial fishermen and the humungous Alaskan cruise ships that "wouldn't even feel a bump if they hit you," as Bogen poetically put it. Second, it's important to follow the rules for observing orcas without spooking them. The guidelines state watercraft must approach orcas only from the side, not head on or from behind, and must not

go closer than 100 metres, nor come between the whales and the shore. Of course, as was our experience, the orcas sometimes approach you, and that's when it gets interesting.

Orcas almost never act aggressively toward humans, but if startled or if it looks like you are pursuing them, they might remind you who's boss of the water. Orca researcher Alexandra Morton once wrote about following a pod in her small Zodiac motorboat when a large male turned around and swam straight toward her. She took the hint and reversed course, and the male rejoined his pod. Our guides also knew where to find the best campsites along the steep rock-and-driftwood-strewn shores of the strait. We put into the water about 1½ hours' drive past Campbell River, after taking a ferry to Nanaimo from Vancouver and driving up the island.

Although our initial goal was to paddle through the channels to the north of the strait, we were seeing so much orca action where we were that we voted to stay in the same camping spot, on West Cracroft Island, four nights in a row. That way, we avoided having to tear down and set up camp every day. We slept till 8, ate a leisurely breakfast, then spent four to six hours a day kayaking and looking for whale spouts. This still left us with lots of time to relax on shore, and even to hike up to Eagle Eye, an orca observation post on the high cliffs overlooking the Robson Bight reserve.

Our guides also did all the cooking -- everything from breakfast burritos to smoked salmon appetizers and wild mushroom risotto -- and washed all the pots. Sea to Sky provides tents, sleeping bags, kayaking wet gear, dry-bags for personal gear and an advance packing list of everything else we might need. Bogen and Boxwell taught the five beginners among us how to handle a sea

kayak. Only the two Brits, Jonny and Jo, real outdoor enthusiasts, had prior experience.

To my surprise, sea kayaks proved remarkably stable, much more than a canoe, because you sit on a seat just centimetres above the flat U-shaped bottom of the hull, whereas paddlers sitting in canoes have a higher centre of gravity. (River kayaks are typically tippier because of the thin V-shape of the hull.) Josh and I found our double-seater virtually untippable, and no one took a spill on the trip.

The cost of stability is manoeuvrability. A two-person kayak that's long and wide would be hard to steer if not for the rudder, which is turned by pressing on foot pedals in the rear seat that are hooked to the rudder by wires. After the first five or 10 minutes, for me it clicked just like riding a bike, and I felt as if I'd been steering a kayak all my life. The other novices on the trip all learned equally fast. The only real challenge was learning to read the tides and the weather, which can change rapidly on Johnstone Strait, a wide channel that separates Vancouver Island from a cluster of smaller islands. It's hard to paddle against a strong headwind, and fog can put you in the path of a large powerboat -- another good reason to go with guides.

But in good weather, the paddling was surprisingly easy and swift. We covered 10 kilometres our first day in just four hours. The trick, according to Boxwell, is to press your knees and ankles against the hull, for an efficient energy transfer from your arms to the boat. Braced like that, you can use the large muscles of your back, rather than the smaller muscles of your arms, which can get tired and strained if you make them do all the work. I was always glad, however, when we stopped for lunch somewhere on

shore so I could get out and give my 46-year old back a good stretch.

Altogether, we spent four days paddling on the water. The weather shifted between sun and light rain, but we kept dry inside our kayaks and rain ponchos. When it rained, it got chilly, but it felt okay if we kept up the paddling. When the sun came out, we stripped down to T-shirts and life preservers, slathered on the sunscreen and basked in the surrounding wild beauty, with not a house nor a road anywhere to be seen on either shore.

More than once we found ourselves surrounded by large pods of white-sided dolphins, leaping and frolicking in the waves. On one occasion, a pair of them headed straight for the Brits' kayak, and split to shoot by on either side of it, just beneath the surface, giving the couple a spectacular, up-close view.

We saw both Dall's and harbour porpoises, and once a massive humpback whale, a rare and endangered species, cruising slowly down the strait. Bald eagles and dozens of other species of birds filled the air, and the seashore was bright with purple and red starfish and sea urchins. Salmon leaped from the waves around us, though Josh and my attempts to catch them with rod and reel proved futile. In the evening after dinner, Josh and I would go down to the water's edge and throw rocks, and watch green phosphorescence released from tiny sea organisms ripple across the surface.

The orcas, however, remained the main attraction. In the space of those four days, we saw more than 100 of them, above average, said our guides.

Bogen and Boxwell brought along several books about orcas and other coastal residents. Teachers at heart, they shared all that they knew about killer whales.

They told us orcas are actually the largest member of the dolphin family. They have the second-largest brains on the planet, next to sperm whales. Males and females stay with their mother throughout their lives, making for tight kinship groups called pods. Researchers have discovered that each pod has its own distinctive dialect, and that related pods seem to have related dialects.

There are also tales of orcas bringing dogs lost at sea back to shore, and more than one amazing incident -- documented by Morton in her book, *Listening to Whales: What the Orcas have Taught Us* -- of apparent telepathy between orcas and humans. Morton spent more than 20 years studying B.C.'s wild orcas, and writes about them with knowledge and passion.

Orcas have come a long way in public perception. Just 25 years ago, killer whales were considered a menace to humans. In the 1960s, a machine gun was even installed at the entrance to Pender Harbor, about 60 kilometres north of the U.S.-B.C. border, in order to shoot them. (It was never used.) Then in the mid-sixties came the era of Shamu, the first of many captive, trick-performing orcas that caused people to flock to marine parks and aquariums. Big bucks were paid for captured orcas, and Canada kept catching them long after the United States forbade the practice in 1972.

According to researcher Morton, more than 200 orcas have died in captivity, surviving only 5.2 years on average, as opposed to many decades in the wild. *Free Willy*, the movie about the release of a fictional captive orca, turned public sentiment against keeping these

intelligent mammals in concrete tanks. The Vancouver Aquarium finally ended its display of live orcas in 2001. Niagara's Marineland is the only place in Canada that still owns captive orcas.

According to Morton's book, after it became illegal to capture orcas on the B.C. coast during the eighties and nineties, she and other researchers noticed a gradual recovery of the local population, with numbers levelling out in 2001. Now, dwindling salmon stocks, pollution, and increased powerboat traffic (which messes with the whale's echolocation) threaten their survival.

One of the most bizarre things we witnessed on Johnstone Strait is that while kayaks and small craft are required by B.C. law to stay out of the designated orca ecological reserve, dozens of salmon fishing boats chug right into it and set out their nets. Fisheries Canada permits commercial fishing within the preserve, and federal law overrides provincial law, so our guides explained.

Less visible, but far more deadly, are the controversial Atlantic salmon fish farms to the north of Johnstone Strait. In *Listening to Whales*, Morton recounts how she once thought fish farms could fit in with the local ecosystem, but in practice, some farms have cut corners, and have been implicated in contaminating the water and spreading disease to the wild fish that orcas eat. Reading her book -- from her perspective as both local resident and scientist -- has put farmed salmon off my menu for good. On our last evening on the water, we had a campfire by the water's edge. We cooked Jiffy Puff popcorn over the flames -- "the old fashioned way," as I explained to Josh. Suddenly, we heard a now-familiar "khwoof!" at close range.

A pod of orcas had swum into the little cove near our camp, and were gliding back and forth, probably snacking on salmon. They swam so close we could see their black fins against the waves.

Suddenly one of them swooped close where the water ran deep right against the shore, setting the phosphorescent water bugs alight. We saw the orca's body outlined in glowing green no more than five metres away. It was like watching northern lights in orca form.

Returning to work in Maryland the following week, the world seemed somehow bigger, more magical, knowing the orcas are out there. Even now, I can still close my eyes, and see the powerful, graceful arc of a black back, and a shimmering outline of phosphorescent green. Josh tells me that it's a moment he has recounted many times to his high-school friends, capturing the moment for them in teenage language: "The orca was like, swoosh, and the green was like, glow, and we were all like, eeee. . . . It was awesome!" *Tim Ward's latest book, Savage Breast: A Man's Search for the Goddess, is due out in 2006.*

### Pack your bags

### WHEN TO GO

Orcas typically arrive in Johnstone Strait with the first salmon runs in June and stay until November. Best times to visit are early July until the second week of September. The weather runs 22 to 25 degrees during the day, and evenings are as low as 15. Expect sunshine, rain, fog and wind (in my experience, all on the same day). These are the driest months along the coast, and rainfall is usually not continuous. Sea to Sky provides a list of what clothing, supplies, tents, waterproof jackets and camping gear to take.

### KAYAKING COMPANIES

**Sea To Sky Expeditions:** 1-800-990-8735 or 604-594-7701; <http://www.canadianexpeditions.com>. Six-day "Orcas of the Pacific" expedition costs \$1,250 a person. Eleven trips through Johnstone Strait are scheduled this summer, from mid-June through September. It's recommended to book three months ahead to be sure to get the week you want.

Several companies offer similar four-to-six-day kayaking tours of Johnstone Strait. It's worth comparing before you go. Options include:

**Spirit of the West:** 1-800-307-3982; <http://www.kayak-adventures.com>.

**Northern Lights Expeditions:** <http://www.seakayaking.com>; 1-800-754-7402.

**Pacific Northwest Expeditions:** <http://www.seakayakbc.com>; 1-866-529-2522.

**Kingfisher Wilderness Adventures:** <http://www.kingfisher-adventures.com>; 1-866-546-4347.

**Wildheart Adventures:** 1-877-722-3683; <http://www.kayakbc.com>.

**Pacific Rim Paddling:** 250-384-6103; <http://www.pacificrimpaddling.com>.

**Discovery Expeditions:** 1-888-756-0099; <http://www.orcaseakayaking.com>