



# The PRINCESS In Winter

*In the off-season, Princess Louisa feels like the last place on earth. Its beauty and solitude are unforgettable.*

Top: Almost there. Early morning scene promises better to come.  
Right: Never a crowd in winter.



By Tonnae K. Hennigan

We all love exploring the coast in the summer, but we can do without the crowded conditions, and the inevitable tension at day's end when we rush to an anchorage along with 20 other boaters, all hurrying to find a spot.

Our solution to the good-weather woes? Visit the most desirable locations in winter when everyone else is snuggled up with VCRs and hockey games. Invariably we find that in winter, we're about the only ones braving cool, wet weather for the sake of a break from the city.

A couple of winters ago, right after the Christmas crazies, we spent a glorious 21 days cruising through the Gulf Islands to Victoria. We could not have found a better return to sanity, and we lucked into mild, sunny weather for the whole cruise. Encouraged, we sallied forth last March to Princess Louisa Inlet to find we had this breathtakingly beautiful spot all to ourselves. Our 12-day cruise was among the most relaxing and awe-inspiring we've made.

Summer doesn't necessarily guarantee good weather at Princess Louisa, and you can sometimes get two weeks of rain. Any time of the year, you pay your money and take your chances, but in the winter, you are guaranteed solitude, peace and quiet. We lucked into sunny skies 11 out of 12 days.

We packed our copy of *Pacific Yachting's Cruising Guide to British Columbia, Vol. III, Sunshine Coast* by Bill Wolferstan. As always with this series, we found the detailed information about each location invaluable, and the snippets of history intriguing.

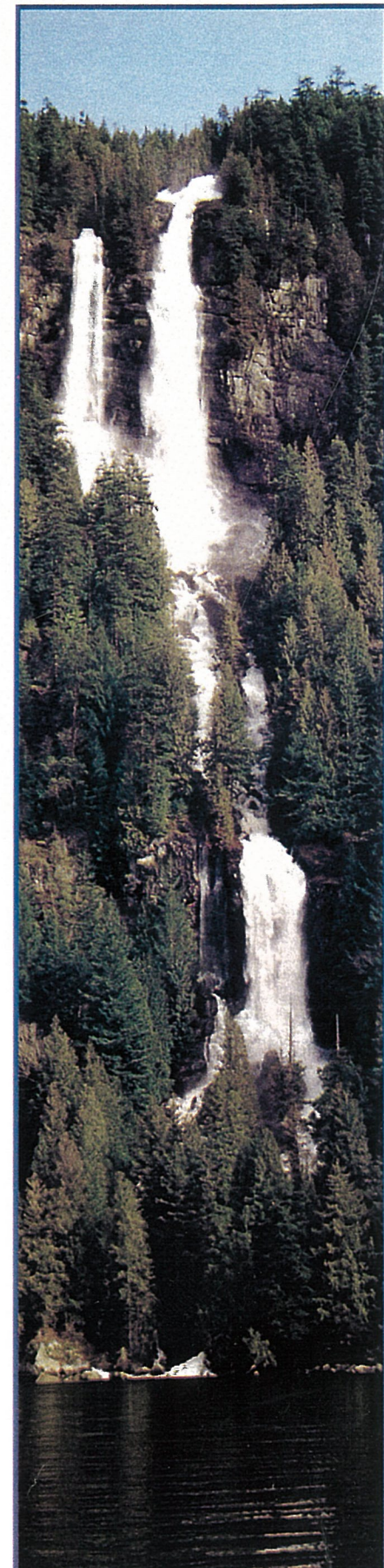
**ATMOSPHERE** Departing Vancouver on our 25' Northern sailboat *Wave Dancer*, we stopped at Plumper Cove on Keats Island the first night. Next day, we detoured to Secret Cove in hopes of topping up our water and fuel (not to mention finding a shower and chocolate bar) only to find everything closed for the winter. So we nipped back around the corner to anchor in Smuggler's Cove. This pretty, protected little spot was deserted except for ourselves, some ducks and a loon who condescended to add atmosphere with his haunting call.

We continued sailing and motoring northwest, turning almost due north into Agamemnon Channel just past Pender Harbour. At the end of this channel, we entered Hotham Sound, where an incredible fall of water empties from Freil Lake and tumbles about 600' to the sea. Edging the boat as close as possible, we felt the fine spray on our faces as we gazed up and up and up—a harbinger of still better things to come. A half mile past the falls, we anchored in the Harmony Islands, one of the few protected spots in Hotham Sound.

Next morning, we backtracked past Captain Island and Agamemnon Channel into Skookumchuk Narrows, stopping at Egmont for fuel, groceries, steamy showers and the best fishburger ever at the Backeddy Pub and Restaurant.

There are two small marinas at Egmont. The first includes the pub/restaurant and a separate shower block; the second, Bathgate Marina, about a half mile farther, offers fuel, general store, and shower/laundry facilities. A brisk march up a two-mile trail brought us to Sechelt Rapids at the peak of the action. The water was running at about

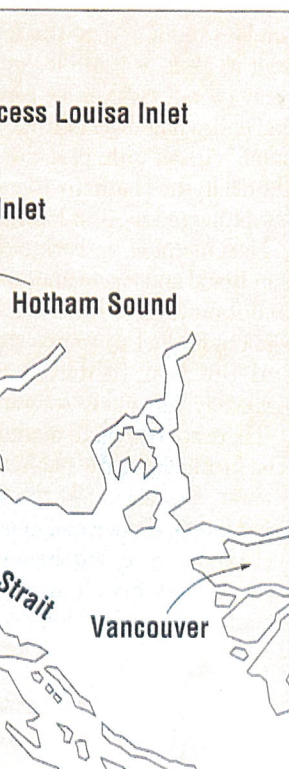
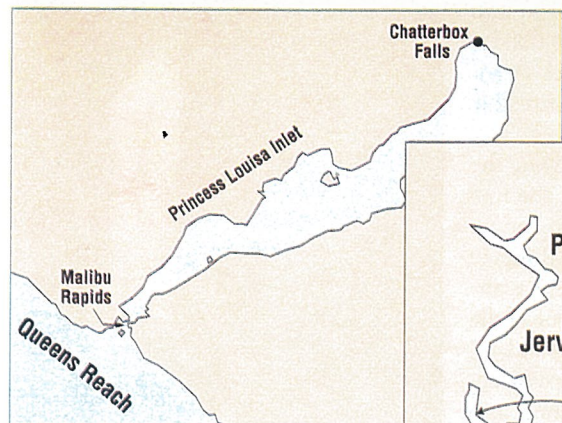
**Spectacular Freil Falls,  
Hotham Sound.**



TONNAE K. HENNIGAN PHOTOS



Princess Louisa dock, 400' of space. Shore walk leads to Chatterbox Falls, just left of centre



### Louisa's History

James F. "Mac" MacDonald first saw Princess Louisa in 1910. He returned 1927, bought land around Chatterbox Falls, and lived there each summer, hosting visitors from around the world. In 1953, he gave the land to the non-profit Princess Louisa International Society, and supported its conversion to a provincial marine park in 1972.

12kts (it can do 14) and the passage was a caldron of whirlpools, falls and backeddies. It's worth seeing, and the hike offers welcome exercise.

Days being short, we then made a beeline from Egmont to Dark Cove, behind Sydney Island, at the entrance to Prince of Wales Reach, Jarvis Inlet. The inlet proceeds, snake-like, first north, then west, then north and west again, changing its name as it changes direction. About six miles before the head of Jarvis Inlet, Princess Louisa Inlet branches off to the north. You enter through Malibu Rapids within half an hour of slack tide. Because there are few good anchorages along Prince of Wales, Princess Royal or Queens Reaches, plan on a 30-mile non-stop trip, timed to arrive at slack tide.

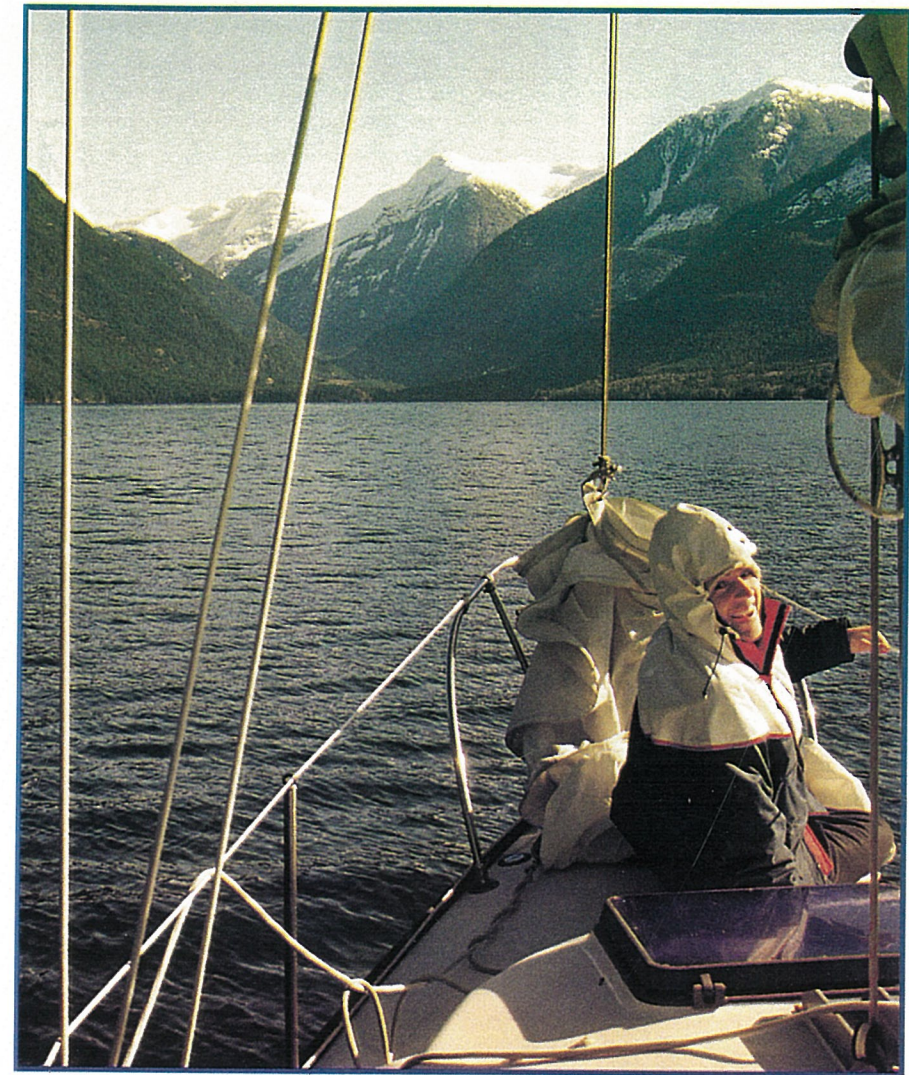
**PICTURE BOOK** Given the short winter days, we were chugging up the inlet by 0500hrs, watching the sky slowly lighten to silhouette the darkened mountains. The channel is fairly wide, and as the day warmed and a

breeze came down off the hills, we were able to sail, tacking back and forth up the inlet. As the sun crept higher, it revealed an awesome vista of rosy, snow-covered peaks, like turning pages in a picture book. We passed just one other vessel, carrying material for a work camp, otherwise we had entered the solitude we hoped to find. Other than two small powerboats and a floatplane that came by on the first day, this splendid isolation continued throughout our four-day stay in Princess Louisa.

Forty-five minutes after passing through calm Malibu Rapids, we arrived at the head of Princess Louisa Inlet, a spectacularly beautiful bay surrounded by high, snow-capped mountains whose slopes fall right into the sea. The muted rush and rumble of Chatterbox Falls at the head of the inlet provides pleasant background music. During winter months, fierce, cold williwaws sometimes blow down off the mountains, but because there is no fetch for waves of any size to develop, you are well protected.

We tied to the sturdy 400' dock for easy access to shore. A pleasant trail leads to well-kept outhouses, a large gazebo with cooking grills, picnic tables, and the falls. There is another trail that makes quite an arduous hike up to the snowfields, but we found a lot of snow and the trail hard to follow. However, we did use the snow close to shore to keep our ice box cold.

**CREAKING AND RUMBLING** At night, we gazed up at a starlit sky, half-obscured by the towering, black mountains. In the morning, we awoke to the popping, creaking and rumbling sounds of avalanches high up in the peaks. We spent our afternoons lolling about in the warm sun, rowing about the bay to discover hidden nooks and crannies and



"Pinch me. I'm dreaming!" Early morning vistas along Princess Royal Reach.

mini-waterfalls, and doing a bit of fishing.

For four days, we saw no other human beings. We couldn't use our radio due to the mountain barrier. We felt like the last people on earth. The bigness of the universe was very real, and made all tensions, worries, and small thoughts vanish.

### Beautiful But Dangerous

The sheer cliffs, rugged mountains and plunging waterfalls around Princess Louisa Inlet are the basis of its charm, but they are also hazardous. Even in summer, these mossy, unstable slopes are dangerous. In *The Curve of Time*, Muriel Wylie Blanchet wrote of almost falling while climbing beside Chatterbox Falls. Since then, a dozen less fortunate people have died following in her footsteps.

Winter conditions make the risks still more extreme. In addition to the obvious hazards of slippery ice and snow, rocks and boulders are loosened by water freezing in cracks. Even if you stick to the foreshore, the risk of rockfalls shouldn't be discounted.

With a little common sense, there's no reason Louisa should not be enjoyed in all seasons. In winter, however, the cruise should be ap-

proached as a wilderness adventure with boat and crew prepared to handle most emergencies without outside aid. There's usually a caretaker at Malibu Lodge who can be raised on VHF, but radio communications with the outside world will likely be thwarted by the surrounding peaks.

Periodically during the winter, strong outflow winds (up to 60kts) occur in mainland inlets such as Jarvis when cold Arctic air spills over the mountains and cascades down to the ocean. This typically occurs during spells of clear, cold weather, and is usually forecast accurately on marine weather broadcasts. Seaworthy vessels with good ground tackle should not be in danger. But be prepared to hole up if necessary.

—Sven Donaldson