

FOUR PROSPECTORS

After 1909 when world copper prices fell, mines in Van And a closed. Some unemployed men continued to prospect around Texada but four adventurous friends decided to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

I the summer of 1903 William Sromberg, James Raper, George McLeod and Billy Law planned an ambitious expedition to investigate old copper workings on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii).

Keeping in mind that small rowboats were the “family car” of the time, the four thought nothing of embarking on their 1000km odyssey in their 16-foot, clinker-built rowboat powered only by oars and sails.

Favourable winds sped their passage northward from Texada but fighting the headwinds in Johnstone Strait proved exhausting and progress was slow. Stormy seas sometimes forced them to remain ashore for days, nights spent in sleeping bags on the beach. Their stash of dried fruit, flour, yeast and some canned food was eagerly devoured.

After regrouping at Alert Bay the men headed north to attempt Queen Charlotte Sound. Luckily Captain Warner of the coastal freighter *Bosquitz* recognized their need and offered to tow them across the dangerous open waters.

When a storm broke half way across, the men went “below” into the ship’s hold, presently occupied by a tethered, bellowing, malcontented bull! As the seas grew stronger the bull broke loose and all five “steerage passengers” were tossed wildly back and forth. The roar of the bull and shouts of the men alerted the crew who arrived to help restore order.

After camping at Bonita Island, a steady breeze welcomed them into Hecate Strait. Unfortunately the wind soon dropped, forcing the four to take turns rowing all day and night. A sudden storm broke, tossing and battering their little boat. Thoroughly exhausted, their boat damaged and their provisions wrecked the four Texadans made it to Queen Charlotte’s south shore.

They were rescued by the Haida who, despite their fearsome reputation, welcomed them, repaired the rowboat and took them to Skidegate where they were treated to a feast and offered lodging.

The Haida Gwaii prospects must have shown promise as the prospectors returned over the next several summers to work the claims.

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These story details are from Violet Seaman’s August, 1947 article in the *Powell River News*.

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