

Camp Diary – January, 2015

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My pal G-Man, Trooper, his collie-blue heeler cross and I set off for the camp on January 12th by BC Ferry departing at 0630 from Horseshoe Bay to Nanaimo's Departure Bay Terminal and from thence to Campbell River and finally aboard the 1230 ferry from Campbell River to Quatiaski Cove for the final haul up the logging road to Hoskyn Channel Landing, and then by ZODIAC over to the camp. It turns out that G-Man is a picky eater, so he got to buy his supplies in Campbell River. Fortunately, chicken nuggets do not travel well.



Employing the ZODIAC found us unpacked and snug in the cabin by 1500. Walking up the trail from the cabin I was rendered momentarily gobsmacked by the sight of a thirty foot alder fallen across my new outhouse. Luckily, it was indeed built like the proverbial shit-house and escaped serious damage. Phew, it's only taken fifteen years to build.



Colds are our curse so far in 2015, everyone gets some, we did not escape. These deteriorated from being merely bloody annoying to thoroughly unpleasant bouts of unrelieved coughing accompanied by copious tides of snot and phlegm rising and falling according to the vicissitudes of the snot mongers that lurk at our peripheries. Nothing personal, I mention this only because I want you to share our misery. You are welcome. Thank you.

Here in Vancouver, on the 7th, the weather turned from frosty, dry, cool and clear to heavily occluded and we were once again socked-in with heavy showers, the temperature rising to a balmy +10C. The local ski resorts had opened for the New Year after a weak start with only machine-made snow below the alpine, except for a couple of days in November. When the temperature here (*at about 70 M above sea-level*) is above +6C, I hear that Grouse, Cypress and Seymour, our local ski mountains all suffer, and avid skiers must travel to Whistler/Blackcomb and further afield. Mt. Washington, 1590 M/5220 FT, more or less at the geographical centre of Vancouver Island, close to the latitude of Maurelle Island, has no base and no prospects, and for the second year has yet to open and probably will not. Meanwhile, Desolation Sound, at zero elevation, received nearly 50 Cm of wet snow in the course of a few short hours, tearing off optimistic maple limbs and the nascent feathers of the conifers, and forcing the alders into contortions.

The snow vanished almost as quickly as it came, and during our first visit of the New Year at first glance it seemed as if some unexplained cataclysm had taken place. Debris from the forest carpeted the ground and I had visions of some dramatic windstorm, but no, it was the snow. Rachael, Roger's muse, observed that this press of wet snow has subtly changed the landscape by pressing down the underbrush of salmon berry, blackberry, bracken and such like, providing rarely offered glimpses deep into leafless alder stands and beyond...Rachael sees much that I miss.

Back at the house hang a couple of halved coconuts which are regularly topped-up with lard mixed with birdseed. As a result of these and the bird feeder, we enjoy visits by a mated pair of hairy woodpeckers, tanagers, American robins, red-winged blackbirds, northern flickers and the usual chick-a-dees, towhees and sparrows. Just along the Trans-Canada Trail; which passes along the bottom of the garden, a gyrfalcon has been spotted at the giant grain silo operated by Viterra. This draws a staggering numbers of cameraed and scoped twitchers who peer purposefully into the mist hoping for a glimpse of this rare visitor - normally, he winters in Alaska, but unattached males may be seen elsewhere and this is probably one of those. I observed him travelling from another silo on the north side of Burrard Inlet, back to his roost at Viterra and I suspect he does this often as by merely perching at Viterra, it seems he's displaced thousands of pigeons and those who remain are skittish as virgins at a barn dance.

During my December trip I noticed our very own gyrfalcon at the camp, he may have supplanted the peregrine seen snatching goslings in the middle of 2014, but last week he did not look happy being ruffled, sullen and distinctly sorry for himself, perched on an alder just above the foreshore whilst being rudely and loudly harassed by a brace of large and determined ravens. It took me a while to decide on his identity until his unmistakable and aristocratic plumage was revealed as he plummeted from his perch towards the foreshore before streaking off to evade his tormentors. I shall seek him out if he is still there later in the year - I hope he is.



Raucous and sustained cawing by a murder of crows, or a conspiracy of ravens, is their way of both broadcasting a warning to their companions and scouring birds of prey hidden amongst the foliage of the conifers and alders dotting the foreshore. At last, red-eyed and angry, the owl, falcon or hawk, or whatever it is, will break and flee. Last week this led me to a short-eared owl during my afternoon shuffle (*it used to be a run, later it became a jog, now it's just a shuffle*) the 5 km from home to New Brighton Park and back. Eagles and others receive the same treatment. At the camp, in the shadow of the cabin, lay the very last of the aforementioned snow, and there we saw the tracks of at least three coastal wolves - big, medium and little paw prints...probably mum, dad and a cub.

That night, at three thirty in the morning a lone wolf commenced yelping and howling for an hour or more. It is impossible to convey this sound, but I'll try and hint at it. It is at once eerie, threatening, chilling, impossibly sad and sustained, wild and lyrical, but more than anything it is a sound that fills an unspoken void. It is worth waking-up for and when it ends the plaintiff cries linger on the air and one listens for ages hoping that it will start again. I'm pretty sure he was on the bluff overlooking Settlers Islands Marine Park; which is no more than 500 M from us. Trooper seemed quite unconcerned, but I noticed that he stayed carefully close to camp.

By some quirk of the ephemerals, and for all of my last three visits I somehow have managed to arrive when the tides are highest during the day, depriving us of a large flat area in daylight and close by for walking and beach combing and not to mention all manner of oysters, clams, sea cucumber, salicornia, kelp for salads and other greens, urchins, crabs and anything else too slow to escape our merciless gaze and rumbling stomachs, well mine anyway. As a result, I suggested Graeme shine his torch over the old dock rip-rap



where he might spy the mink as they came to feed amongst the rocks to satisfy his curiosity. Their eyes are little ruby-red flashes of light. By now it was six thirty and pitch dark, I lay snoozing on



the settee when Graeme rushed in declaring there was a cougar outside. We ran out and by god there was. A beautiful, fully grown and very large cougar, distinctly tri-colored and not more than 60 M away, about half-way between the first stream and the camp, it's great paunch of muscle and gut framed by thigh-thick fore-legs, mighty haunches, and a great switching tail that looks as long as the cat itself. The cougar lingered a minute or so, more disturbed by our voices I think than by the light, and turned away crossing the stream entering the salal below where Fred the eagle butchers crabs. People

live their whole lives out here and never see a cougar. This is my second, actually I think it is the same one; which stalked me back in 2011, not 500 M from where we are standing. We were both thrilled, brilliant (*thank you, Bernie*).

Q: Why are a tornado and a Cougar divorce similar? A: You know someone is going to lose a house trailer!

G-Man was excellent company, he has a fascination with Nietzsche, Hemingway, Williams (*Robin*), and what he referred to as the nobility of suicide - surely and affront to life affirmation? He also admitted using this as a pick-up line. Unfortunately, this did not go down well as the subject, a young woman, was in a degree of mental anguish and this suggestion resulted in a bit of a breakdown not really alleviated when her friend told G-Man that she was 'fragile'. If he wants to get laid I suggested he take dance lessons and screw Nietzsche. As for Hemingway and Williams, in my opinion the former wrote a few good books but gave in to booze. Anyway, he shot himself in the gut whilst trying to execute a fish, and realizing that his failure was incomplete he shot himself again. Williams was good as Mork and spent the rest of his career trying too hard - a state of grace is hard to find. Nietzsche had syphilis and developed his alluring but corrupted vision of *kueltur* during recurring bouts of paresis and plegia. When not discussing the merits of Fred's drug-fuelled philosophies, G-Man read most of Bram Stoker's valedictory novel when we were not otherwise debating the merits of Ernest and Robin. I wonder what Stoker's non-erotic sanguinerian would make of Buffy and her ilk?

I have to build a wood shed. Somewhat unwillingly I might also admit that I have deliberately avoided doing anything for years, but suddenly my footprint is sprawling and I am greedy for space and comfort, witness the outhouse. When the decision was made to move the containers to

gain a few centimeters of elevation as a basic defense against the possibilities of tidal surge as a result of an earthquake, disorient them from the wind that funnels over the saddle during outflow winds, change the vista and erect a deck between them I made of myself a slave. I realize now that by moving all the wood out from under the containers and storing it under tarps in the open I have only caused myself discomfort: (1) the wind now whistles where the wood used to insulate, cooling the accommodations, (2) the wood is wet, is harder to burn and, (3) I keep losing track of dry wood resulting in tarry conflagrations and not much heat. OK, so I won't build a woodshed. The camp is at the convergence of three great channels: Hoskyn Channel which runs from south of Heriot Bay to Surge Narrows, Okisollo which runs north from Surge Narrows and Whiterock which traverses from Calm Channel in the east to Surge Sound.



Located right in the SW corner is the float home used in the movie "[Popeye](#)". This property was built by its present occupier who has devoted himself entirely to the bottle since the glory days of movie making and accompanying pockets filled with gold. Alas, the gold has now worn off but the liver now has a mind of its own and often sends a message to its owner that the time is nigh. As a result of this liverish interaction he sometimes mistakes a petulant cirrhosis for a warning of impending death. The last time this happened, back in the autumn, even his sister was persuaded to donate a couple of bottles of

scotch so that he might celebrate in advance with a suitable wake. But, miracle of miracles, each drink seems to empower him and he is still with us. However, Roger and a few others who stayed with him during his last desperate hours were rendered legless and wives and friends were dispatched to bring them home. We must celebrate.

At the eastern end of Whiterock Passage this splendid float home and net loft, complete with a neighbor's Ontario 32 sailboat, sit in a protected little nook, safe and snug from the Nor'easters. I envy their solitude and lapping water.



"*VIRAGO*", our survey vessel soon to be renamed, provides great pleasure and an ever widening perspective of the Salish Sea. I believe it will be necessary to take her up Princess Louisa, Bute, Jervis and Toba Inlets if not this year then next. I believe I will tow "[BoB](#)" and reserve the early evenings for sailing - I shall be looking for a coconspirator and expressions of interest will be sort.

