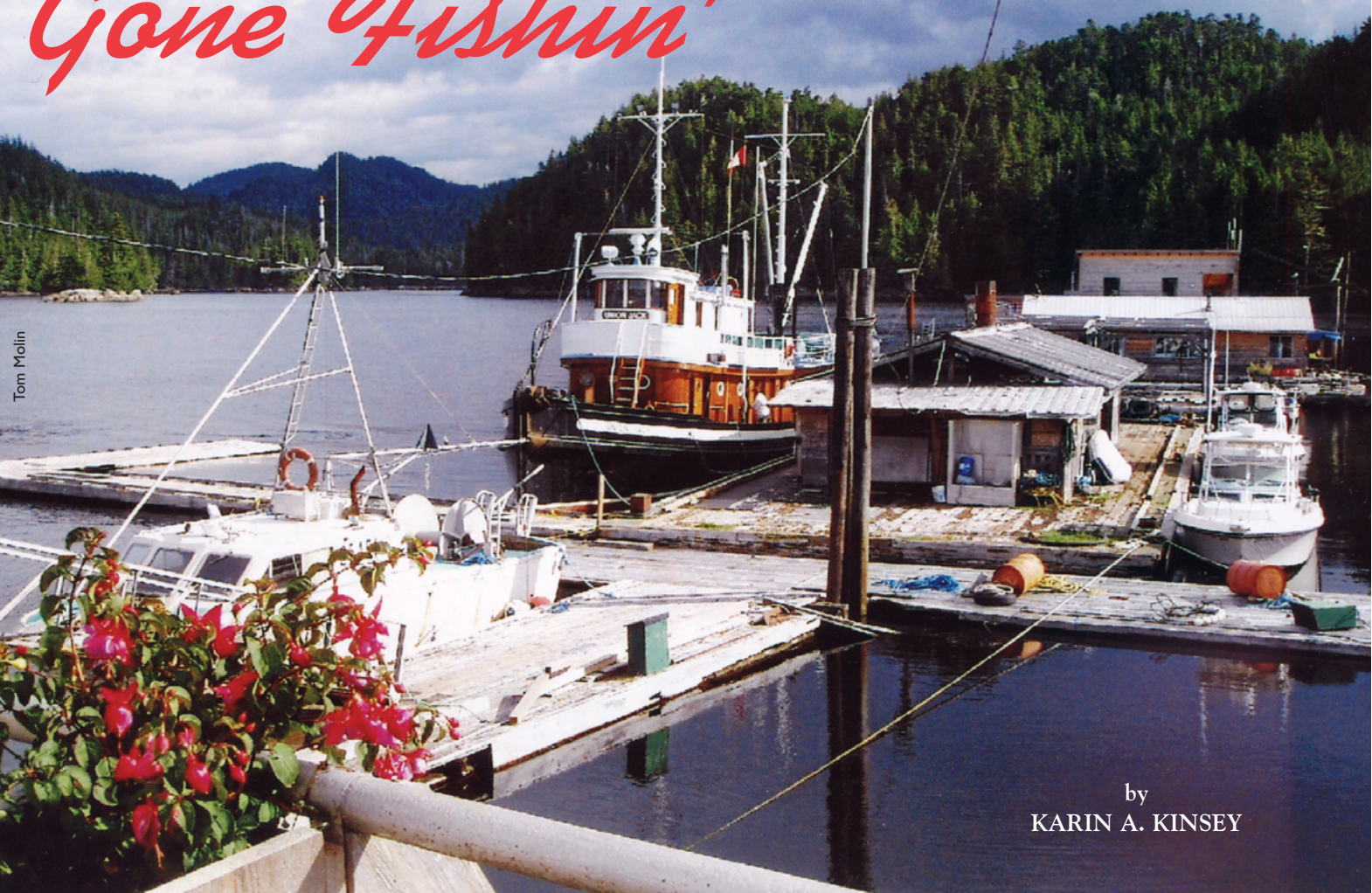


Gone Fishin'

Tom Molin



by
KARIN A. KINSEY

Luxury Tugboat Cruising in British Columbia

“I’ve got a fish,” I yelled excitedly, as the tip of my rod bent sharply towards the water. I could feel a distinctive tug on the other end, and hear the high whine of the line as it sped out from my reel. Calmly, our fishing guide, Rick Jakimchuk, announced over the radio to the other three skiffs in the area, “Karin’s playing a nice coho over here. You can try dropping your lines down to about fourteen pulls.”

Nervously, I started winding in the line. “Not too fast,” Rick said. “Let him run if he wants.” Again the line spun out as the fish danced across the wave tops. The silver from its body glinted in the sunlight as it leapt again. In the distance I could see the fir-lined shores of countless islands floating across the blue-gray sheen of a wide channel.

Suddenly, my skiff-mate, Nan, shouted, “I’ve got one too!” Our boat erupted into what seemed like pure pandemonium. My line needed to go beneath hers as my fish bolted to the other side of the boat. Nan tripped over the bait bucket as her rod

bent in half over the side. The large net used to scoop fish from the water skittered across the now-slippery bottom of the 18-foot skiff and became entangled in my feet.

In the midst of it all — shouts and peals of laughter — our “zen master” guide, as we liked to call Rick, remained unruffled. Instead he seemed to stay two or three steps ahead of the game while offering a steady stream of encouragement and advice. Fifteen minutes later Nan and I high-fived as two beautiful coho lay shining in the bottom of the boat.

My friend Nan and I had joined six other guests who hailed from Minnesota on a six-day cruise through the Inside Passage of British Columbia with Westwind Tugboat Adventures. Westwind is known as the original tugboat company specializing in “Follow the Fish” adventure trips.

As you readers probably have gathered, I am a novice fisherwoman. When the opportunity first arose to join this trip, I had hesitated. As a woman, I always thought that “going fishing” was

something that the other half of the species — i.e., *men* — did, like going to the ball game. I saw it as a guy-bonding thing.

What reeled me in? I had kayaked in Canada's Inside Passage the summer before and had vowed some day to return to this ruggedly beautiful coastline. In addition, I am of Nordic descent, and after this trip, I believe that the instinct to fish lies deep in my inherited cultural psyche. But perhaps more importantly, something even more mysterious and compelling is at work here. A quote from Henry David Thoreau speaks to this experience: "Many people go fishing all their lives without realizing it's not the fish they're after."

OUR TRIP STARTED FROM THE TINY, REMOTE TOWN OF BELLA BELLA on a small island off the west coast of Canada, about 30 minutes' flying time north of Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. When we arrived it had begun to rain, and pearly layers of clouds blanketed the surrounding pines. Nonetheless, we were cheerfully greeted by Captain Dave Hollis and Rick with an optimistic "Welcome to sunny British Columbia!" Gratefully, we donned the bright orange and green rain slickers they handed to us. After a short skiff ride we clambered aboard what was to be our home for almost a week: the *Union Jack*.

Opposite: The *Union Jack* stops at the small town of Namu.

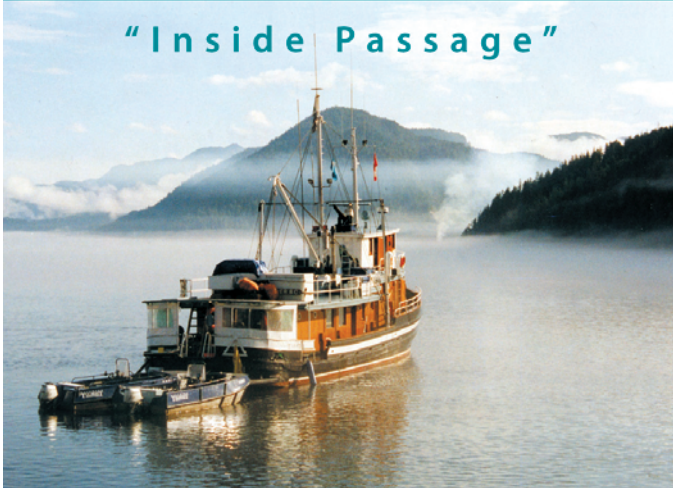
Below: A day's catch of coho.



Rick Jakimchuk


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Tom Molin

Left: Sporting “Reel Women” caps, seven of the twelve people on board for this trip were female.

Below: Skiffs return to the mother ship after a fishing outing.

Opposite: Fishing guide Rick with the “ladies” of San Francisco.

couches, Northwest Native art on the walls, a fireplace, and a small but fully-stocked bar. We learned to expect the gracious smile of our hostess, Jeanne Hollis, when she’d welcome us back from our fishing excursions with wine, hot chocolate with peppermint schnapps, and tempting appetizers.

Moving forward through the ship, guests pass through a cozy galley where all our meals would be served, and a small but fully outfitted kitchen where chef Kim Gauthier tantalized us with her culinary talents for the duration of our stay. Past the galley, two tiled bathrooms offer modern conveniences, including a spacious hot water shower. Next come guest staterooms: one on the main deck and three below. Private and stylishly comfortable, each room has two berths, running water, ample closet space, fluffy white robes and hairdryers.

At the fishing orientation that Rick gave on our first morning, Nan and I tried to absorb all of the new information he presented. We would be wearing rubber boots, bright-yellow waders, and red floater jackets. Next we learned how to prepare the bait. Each herring had been cut at a neat angle to remove the head and then gutted. Our “bait” (or cut plug) would then be “threaded” onto two hooks at the end of our lines. “Presentation is everything,” Rick would say. You wanted the herring to “roll” cleanly in the water, making it look like a live fish to a hungry salmon.

A classic wooden tugboat from 1941, the *Union Jack* was purchased and rescued from a state of total disrepair by the owner of Westwind, Bob Jordon. He and his wife, Kathy, had suffered the loss of their first boat, *Point Hope*, and all their possessions in a tragic fire in 1979. Hard work, determination, and the decision to keep the original 38,000-pound, 400-horsepower diesel engine has made the *Union Jack* the unique high-class timber vessel that she is today.

Guests coming aboard first enter the lounge of the *Union Jack*, which is fitted with two deep-brown, plush leather

Karin A. Kinsey



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We also had to learn to operate our individual skiff (the *Union Jack* towed five small boats aft) and manage our rods at the same time. Once we hooked a salmon, we'd have to reel the fish in, net it, extract the hooks, and give the fish a swift blow to the head. Sometimes the salmon won. If a fish was smart enough to run off with the bait, hook and weight, we would need to know how to replace everything.

THERE WAS ALSO THE QUESTION OF WHERE THE FISH WERE. Often Rick would indicate how many pulls (two arm-lengths) of line to release for the depth where the salmon might be running. Often a good place to fish lies at the tide-lines, where two currents of water meet. We would see bits of debris and seaweed floating in these strips as the fish beneath us fed on smaller baitfish.

On our first morning out by ourselves Nan and I focused on handling our skiff. As we motored away from the *Union Jack*, the sympathetic eyes of the chef followed us, wondering how the two "ladies" from San Francisco were going to manage on their own. After getting the hang of driving while we explored a beautiful lagoon, we then ventured into the main channel where the others were already fishing. Suddenly, a happy pod of white-sided dolphins surrounded us, jumping alongside, riding our wake, and speeding underneath us.

Later we set our lines, drifted with the tide, and, after a long afternoon, came home with our first two fish — good-sized coho — caught single-handedly. We were on our way to becoming "reel" women; we had done Rick proud.

As the week progressed, we learned to trust our women's intuition and soon came up with our own fishing rituals. After arriving at the "right" spot, Nan and I would lean over the boat's side and tell the fish and its buddies that if they got caught, it probably would be their first and only chance to come to California. This trick seemed to produce some amazing results!

Although fishing formed a major part of each day's activities, many other events continued

to weave a web of magic into our Westwind experience. One morning we piled into one of the larger skiffs and headed to a small beach for clam digging. Equipped with rakes and shovels, we dug into the shallow sand to uncover the coveted little-neck clams that later appeared at our dinner table.

Another afternoon we motored up an inland river at high tide. Soon lines from seven or eight fly rods shot over the side — we'd seen fish jumping in mid-stream. Our boat came home laden with bright coho. We also harvested enough Dungeness crabs from the three large crab pots we had dropped near the river's mouth to feast in grand style.

One beautiful evening some of us gathered on the roof of the *Union Jack* after dinner to chat and enjoy the last rays of the sun. Suddenly, we noticed a humpback whale off our stern. Before our eyes the whale began to create a perfect circle of bubbles — a bubble-net. Then the whale burst up from the depths into the center of the ring with its mouth open wide to capture the herring that had been trapped inside. The humpback

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then proceeded to repeat this maneuver several times on the other side of the lagoon.

Later that night we saw the long, soft curtains of the northern lights as they shimmered behind the outline of a dark mountain range. The following evening we witnessed the glittering sparkle of bioluminescence — glow-in-the-dark illumination from algae and plankton — that merged with the reflection of the stars in the water. In the darkness, we could hear the popping sounds of thousands of herring as they surfaced to feed.

This part of the world hums and pulses with life — the long expanses of water, the chains of tiny islands strung perfectly together, the burgeoning sea of activity beneath the waves, along the shores and in the air. On our way home after saying goodbye to our new *Union Jack* "family" at the end of our week, Nan

and I found ourselves more than once reflecting on our recent journey. "Do you think we should get our own rods and reels? Maybe next summer ..."

We were hooked. "Going fishing" had become a way of reconnecting and actively engaging in a much greater cycle of life. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION: For details about luxury cruising and wilderness fishing adventures contact Westwind Tugboat Cruises: Tel: 888-599-TUGS; E-mail: cruise@tugboatcruise.com; Website: www.tugboatcruise.com. Cruises depart out of Vancouver, Victoria and Prince Rupert, while fishing adventures are offered in three different areas: Langara Island (the Queen Charlotte Islands), Prince Rupert and Bella Bella.

For more information about additional tour operators and programs, see the Geographical Index under "British Columbia — Fishing."



Tom Molin

GONE FISHIN' — Travel Tips

- Westwind has reserved space with Pacific Coastal Airlines and Hawkair Aviation Services for all "Follow the Fish" packages. The airlines offer guaranteed seating plus transport of luggage and fish for a fixed price that includes taxes and airport transfers.
- The *Parry*, Westwind's second heritage wooden tugboat, can accommodate up to 12 guests.
- Westwind tugboats carry all necessary tackle gear: rods, reels, bait, jigs, flies, as well as all outdoor-weather wear, including rubber boots.
- Onboard freezing and packaging of any fish that are caught while on the trip are provided.