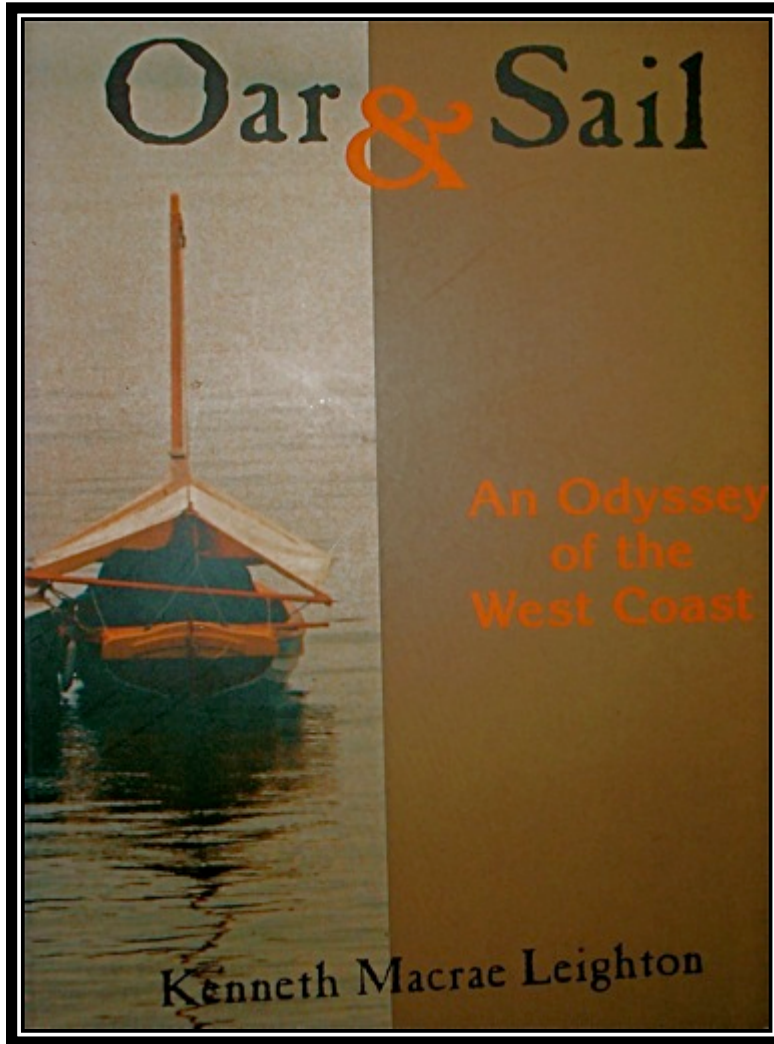


**Oar & Sail from Horseshoe Bay to Maurelle Camp,
Through the Strait of Georgia and the Inside Passage in “BoB”,
a 14’9” DRASCOMBE Scaffie**

by CONTACT _Con-40DC10511 \c \s \l Tim Ellis

While searching the shelves of a used book store I encountered a slim volume posthumously published under the title of “Oar & Sail - An odyssey of the West Coast”, by Dr. Kenneth Macrae Leighton, who sailed and rowed his 14 foot



wooden boat, sporting an unstayed standing lugs'l rig, and a pair of nine-foot wooden oars, from Vancouver through the Inside Passage of the Salish Sea to Prince Rupert during two summer holidays. The first part took him up through Surge Narrows to Sonora Island, just past Maurelle Island, where our camp is located, and thence back to Vancouver. Later he launched at Port Hardy, near the Northern tip of Vancouver Island and did the rest. As an inveterate reader of books about sailors and sailing, and a rower and dingy sailor myself his account prodded me to imitate – and the sooner the better!

Leighton's logbook, annotated with sketch maps and caricatures for publication, is an evocation of his passion for the coast and its' history – his boat a scaled down replica of a ship's jollyboat, built locally in wood, and not just any jollyboat, but the one which Bligh sailed and rowed from Tofua to Timor; which now rests in the Greenwich Maritime Museum in London. I like the author's honesty. His is not the colourful language of daring-do. He writes as a man comfortable in his own shoes who takes his time to fulfill a deeply seated

ambition, never hiding his frailties or his mistakes, and I believe a man much beloved by his children who collated his notes and logs, and published this slim volume in his memory, some years after his passing.



Confronted with the conclusion of his first year's odyssey, that and the fact that he set sail in June, and today is June 11th, put me in mind to have a go. There is not much need for trip planning – Leighton's already done it. The tides are with us, the lowest tides occurring in the small hours of the morning. Esther, my muse and very patient wife of twenty five years, and I discussed various possibilities even including her coming with me, but that might be risky, as my basic needs are very basic and anyway I need to test the waters first. In retrospect this is a wise decision. On the other hand "BoB" is in all respects ready for a voyage, being 14'9" long, but also sporting an unstayed standing lug's'l, and a pair of 9'6" carbon fibre oars. Her auxiliary motor, a 3.5 h.p. TOHATSU 2-stroke has been removed, and is on it's stand in the garage. Of course, she is of fibre-glass construction, but her dock appeal is every bit as strong as "Morag Ann", Leighton's boat, and she is all mine. All that remains is a to pack a couple of t-shirts and set-off. Esther looks at my hair and suggests she shear it off, a la hedgehog.

"BoB", our SCAFFIE had a pretty quiet life resting in an Essex boatyard before we brought her over from the UK some years ago, but now she is both well known and highly experienced having had her keels wetted in waters from the Okanagan Lakes in the interior, the mighty Fraser River, the estuaries, bays, and inlets around Vancouver, and as far north as Desolation Sound so often that local residents speak with some ownership about rowing and sailing instead of darting about the place in a fog of gasoline fumes and the cacophony of a hundred, tiny, metal, parts banging together. The SCAFFIE seems an unlikely candidate as a good performer, but a well managed juxtaposition of a fine design from the board of John Watkinson, a retired Royal Navy officer, and sturdy boat building by HONOR MARINE in Devon, U.K., has produced a dinghy that is stable, efficient, and sea kindly. I have yet to trip her up (believe me I have tried) and after the frustrations of my DRASCOMBE LUGGER, "quick, whistle, we need more wind...", the SCAFFIE is simply ideal for carrying a load, and as a comfortable platform for her crew. The standing lugs'l cannot possibly be very efficient, or can it? The fact is that she points well and her time up the Georgia

Strait speaks for itself – 4.5 Knots sustained for 4.6 hours, all in 10~12 knots of breeze on the quarter, and on short rolling seas – that in a boat fitted out and with crew weighing in at around 450 Kilos. Far from being a hindrance the bilge keels; which bracket a perfectly good long, straight, keel, seem to provide some lift without any discernible loss of stability. I carry an 8 Lb DANFORTH anchor with 5 meters of 1/4PC chain, and 50 meters of 10mm double braid nylon rhode. The anchor is ready for instant deployment and lives in a nest at the bow, the rhode stows behind the mast in a plastic flowerpot. The oars are carbon hatchets; which allow one to feather the blades on the surface of the water on the backstroke, and in turn this means that the oar-blade is always correctly presented for the stroke. None of that flailing about in rough water, catching crabs, flopping about and so on. In addition there is a VHF, flares, whistle, bucket and bailer, a good hand bilge pump mounted to the aft stowage locker incorporating its own handle, a 10 cm SILVA removable, backlit, compass – an excellent bit of gear, camping stuff for cooking and sleeping, food but none which



requires refrigeration, an emergency supply of beer and eau de vie, in this case a half bottle of Balvenie single malt in a plastic bottle. The tarpaulin is a featherweight rubberized polyester cloth incorporating lacing eyes which I have sewn on, and which covers the cockpit from the mast to the aft locker with a peak achieved by hauling up on a halyard attached to a loop in the centre of the tarp.

I am also testing a new arrangement to allow brief visits ashore without the need to anchor or tie-off with miles of string. How many times has

one felt the need for relief compromised by the prospect of finding one's yacht beam on to the shore, or worse yet, high and dry? How to enjoy a cocktail with ones pals without going through a huge palava, just for ten minutes ashore? Roger Mattice of Read Island provided me with the answer. So, I visited the local scrap merchant, "Jack's", and bought two iron sash weights – painted red and epoxy coated, one is attached to the stern cleat with a 5 meter line; which happens to be the maximum tidal rise and fall here, and this one is cast out when 5 meters from the beach just prior to landing, the other is attached at the bow, with the weight exactly in the middle of a 10 meter line with a bight at the distant end. The yacht is slowed by tossing out the stern weight, and one steps ashore and drops the second weight on the beach, looping a noose in the bight over any convenient stone, log, or snag, and away you go. The yacht is afloat but

retrievable on the flood, and if the tide is ebbing then still sufficiently immersed to allow one to leave. Use a heavier stern weight for marginal conditions and bigger boats – it seems to work.

My friend, Rob Ruff, has crafted me a very long tiller of alloy; which allows me freedom from the tyranny of a short one. I also added a brass half-round the full length of the keel for grounding, and replaced the original polystyrene granules used for flotation with poured-in two-part PU foam for buoyancy. Bernie Blum suggested I carry, and wear, an immersion suit, but just the thought of trying to row in it makes me hot and bothered, there just is not the room, and donning and doffing the blasted thing is well nigh impossible when sticky and sweaty in a seaway. I have given-up on that idea for the moment, and instead carry a shorty-wetsuit.

So, at 0630, at low water, on Wednesday, 15-June-2011 we trail “BoB” to Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver, rig her and launch, and at 0825 I set off across the Queen Charlotte Channel, rowing and sailing in a breath of WNW winds with a light popple on the water. The winds steadily increase during the day and I put into Gibsons for a cup of coffee and a bowl of soup to escape them just before 1500, departing at 1615 for the passage along the coast to Roberts Creek. Brisk WNW winds make for sailing, but sailing of the wet and wonderful kind, hard on the wind and tacking the whole way, but as 1800 approaches the winds die down to naught well short of Roberts Creek. I row the the last ten or so Km and enter the creek at 2030 to be welcomed by two Auxiliary Coast Guard officers from Gibsons. They saw me exiting the harbour while they were on an SOS call to rescue no less than seven people in the water from a capsized boat. They followed my progress from the coast road, and waxing lyrical about “BoB” they guide me to the safest possible place to tie-up and after a chat about departures and destinations they head home with best wishes for the rest of my trip. Roberts Creek emerges from the interior as a stream of negligible depth and of perhaps 3 or 4 meters width at this time of the year. There is just enough water to float “BoB” to a sandy bank where I tie-off to a baulk of timber, a mere boat length from the low bridge across the creek. No sooner tied-off, the coast guard gone home, than Ben turns up to admire “BoB” and to invite me to join a group of locals for a beer and a whiff of BC’s famous aromatic herb; which I do after a quick dinner. These folk have a spot just at the high water mark, with a pleasant



fire burning, and range from the very young to seventies, gypsies to school teachers, grandmothers to seven year olds, all sharing the pleasure of this peaceful and delightful spot, and I feel quite honoured to be amongst them. Later, as I stood surveying the mooring a small crested bird landed on my head. We both froze for a second or two, until, panic-stricken, he shot off into the twilight, shrieking with hurt pride. This was followed by a deep and satisfying sleep beneath the thwarts loosely covered with a light tarpaulin.

Thursday morning, 16-June-2011, at 0530 finds us at sea in light winds, veering from SE to WNW coupled with a nasty, short, chop; which plays havoc with a small boat such as “BoB” for it is a constant battle to keep her moving. We find the worst of this brutish sea around the southernmost tip of South Thormanby Island in the Malaspina Strait, but at 1115 the sun finally gains ascendance over the haze, the winds and waves drop, and we make steady headway NNW holding roughly two to three miles from the mainland shore. 1415 finds us at Epsom Pt at the extreme northern end of North Thormanby Island and the winds now blow SE and

hard. Before long I have two reefs in the lugs'l, but am still plowing up the channel at an astonishing speed. Seeking some relief and protection, I dive into Quarry Bay on Nelson Island; which protects the northern entrance to Jervis Inlet, but there are almost no beaches or decent anchorages, and every vista is dotted with large holiday homes and haphazardly engineered



docks and piers, all wracking and groaning in the confused swells. I circuit the bay and pop back out into the Strait by Acland Rock and turn once more to the NW around Cape Cockburn and then almost north into Blind Bay before finding a comfortable and protected hole in Musket Island Provincial Park; which is already occupied with several large yachts, mostly American flagged and one, now two, lonely Canadians. We jaw for a few minutes and I am astonished when they tell me they quit the Strait much earlier in the day because it was so rough! I decide to beach “BoB” and enjoy a long slow dinner of one egg, one Bavarian wiener, and Korean noodles all cooked in the same bowl, the same that I enjoyed last night, and will enjoy again tomorrow. Sleep does not come easily as I am beset all about by mosquitoes, and I do not think it would be an exaggeration to suggest that my body is virtually drained of blood by these energetic and noisy contortionists. Somehow the witching hour comes and I awake to the same tune as before, but dawn is breaking and I feel remarkably well rested despite the flying hazards and the itching. I am confident that Esther would not have enjoyed last night, and that she is tucked-up and sound asleep – exactly as it should be!

Friday morning, 0630, finds me full of porridge and with a couple of boiled eggs ready for lunch. My fellow Canadian has rowed over from his CASCADE 29 to chat and he and I man-handle "BoB" into the water as I have misjudged the high tide; which was actually at 0600 – this is easy to do on the coast as the ephemerals are prone to mischievous adjustments by the gods who must laugh at us poor mortals pouring over the almanac as if it were our bible...I escape into Blind Bay and make my way out past Alexander Point, and head NW towards the northern tip of Texada Island and Grief Point; which truly marks the halfway point of my journey separating as it does the doubly protected waters of the Sunshine Coast from the Salish Sea, formerly the Strait of Georgia; which sits in the lee of Vancouver Island and Texada Island. The great bight, North of Texada Island has a long history of storms and loss, and is not for the unwary. The wind is blowing a steady 15~17 Knots from the SE, the sun is shining but not unbearable and temperature is nearly perfect in the 18~20 Celsius range. I have a choice: go inside Harwood Island, leave Savary Island to port and onto Lund for a night's rest, and then the following day up Calm Channel on the east side of Cortes Island, past Read Island before I can turn SE through Whiterock Passage to the camp on Maurelle, or enter the Strait of Georgia and save a day. Here I should



point out that my expectation was for a five to eight day voyage, so if I can do it in three days.... I hum and haw to myself for a few minutes, confident that I will choose the Strait, but measuring my stamina against a long day's sail, the chance of difficult weather and the possible need to seek refuge. At 1139 I transit Algerine Passage between Texada and Harwood Islands and steer 300 magnetic for the southern

tip of Marina Reef between Sutil Pt on Cortes Island to the east and Cape Mudge at the southern tip of Quadra Island to the West. In the Strait itself the winds are more stable and blowing 10~12 with occasional gusts of 15~17 knots, but still SE. The landmarks come and go effortlessly, though not once for the whole time do I take my eyes from the sea ahead, nor a hand from the tiller. The mainsheet cannot be cleated, and it lies in a loop beneath my grip upon the tiller, ready for instant action. All the while the sun shines and the winds blow steadily SE: Vivian Island, Savary Island, Mitlenach Island at 1415, Hernando Island, and finally Marina Island at 1615. From Marina Island I enter Hoskyn Channel, passing the light at 1813 in concert with the dying wind. During the entire passage I did not see a single sail, and perhaps two or three skiffs on the distant peripheries

checking on crab pots and such like. I wonder where everyone is? I row the remaining 20 or so kilometers to the camp aided by the current, oblivious to everything except the poetry of motion and pause, stroke and feather. It is so perfectly still and beautiful in the evening sun. 2100 finds me moored at the camp and admiring the Columbia III, now a Swiss flagged mother ship for kayakers ('yakkers'), but for many years one of the Reverent John Antle's Columbia Coast Mission vessels, providing succour and faith to isolated outposts on the BC Coast. I unload my gear and cook-up the last wiener with an egg and noodles, and I thank Mr. Leighton for his good work and toast to his memory with a large whisky before retiring to dreams in the gentle but persistently rocking arms of Morpheus.



I had planned to spend a day at the camp, then turn around and head back south, but discretion is the better part of valour, and so I leave "BoB" tied-up to a neighbour's dock and hitch a ride back to Vancouver Island and the ferries – "BoB" and I will make the return voyage later.

Day 1 123 16W 49 22N to 123 38W 49 25N 34.2 Km/19 Nm

Day 2 123 38W 49 25N to 124 11W 49 44N 81.4 Km/44 Nm

Day 3 124 11W 49 44N to 125 07W 50 14N 101.3 Km/55 Nm

61 hours of elapsed time from departure to arrival, of which 42 hours spent at sea, and 19 hours resting. Of the 42 hours spent at sea about 15.2 were spent rowing, and the rest of the time under sail. The best average speed I achieved under sail, about 10 K/ph/5.4 Knots, and about 5 K/ph/2.7 Knots under oars alone. The average boat speed for the entire trip is about 5.18 K/ph/2.8 Knots.