

Gulf Island Hints

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Gulf Islands - #1

Take the Tsawwassen Ferry to Galiano Island (only 2/day as of 6/97) and launch from Retreat Cove half way up the west side of the island. If the one mile crossing to Wallace Island Marine Park looks too choppy, consider paddling around protected Montegue Harbor and maybe spending the night there. Throughout this area, you'll be paddling along sandstone cliffs and coves with overhanging arbutus trees and underlying starfish. Check out Chivers Point at the north end of Wallace Island for a lunch and/or camp spot. If you want to camp and Chivers Point is too crowded, pass on the buggy mid island sites with cruiser views and go to a new site that has just been opened at the secluded first cove south of Chivers on the east side of the island. When I was the Point, I met a group of seven women who had been hunkered down there for five days due to strong winds. Conditions permitting, think about paddling on past the Secretary Islands across to Hall and then up to Reid Island overlooking an expansive panorama of sea and islands. When I was there, dozens of eagles were trying to catch their dinner in the currents below. Further north, carefully circle the Rose Islets Ecological Reserve with their abundance of wildlife.

If, on the way back down the east side of Wallace the weather gets nasty, you can wait it out at Panther Point (no camping) on the south end of Wallace.

Gulf Islands - #2

Paddle protected waters south of Gabriola Island in one of few areas that does not require paddling through a major pass with their up to 9 knot swirly currents.

Directions: Take one ferry from Tsawwassen to Nanaimo and another from Nanaimo to Gabriola Island. Drive from the ferry landing on Gabriola Island to the launch at Degnen Bay and park.

Route to Base Camp: Paddle about 5 miles along the spectacular highly sculptured sandstone cliffs of northwest Valdes Island to a lovely new BC Marine Park at Blackberry Point (best in the late afternoon sun). It has an extensive west facing sand beach with protection from wind driven waves. There are plenty of sheltered tent sites (and hammock supports) on the arbutus covered midden above. At the site directly on the point is even a large makeshift table and 4 or 5 benches. Fires in summer are not permitted. Sanitary needs are taken care of at out of sight low tide sites at either end of the beach.

Day two: Paddle over to tiny Tree Island with its lovely pocket beaches and then north along the cliffy arbutus topped west sides of Pylades, Ruxton, Decourcy, and Link Islands. On our trip, we saw seals, oyster catches, kingfishers, blue herons, many eagles, a pair of sleek merlins, and a family of river otters scrambling for cover in the shore rock. Another hour paddling north will take you past the old haunt of Brother 12 and the fiendish Madame Zee* to a lunch spot at the double tombolo between Link and Mudge Islands. Paddle the East Side of the islands on your return and stop at Whaleboat Island Marine Park where there is a lovely sheltered campsite for two on the treed NE point. The landing is on a sandstone ledge, but there is an expansive view up Pylades Channel and Whaleboat Passage.

Day three: Consider a well-timed paddle through Porlier Pass about 3 mile south at slack water to Dionssio Marine Park on the NE corner of Galiano Island (there is a brand new section of the park developed specifically for paddlers). Have lunch or dinner and return with the next slack. If the day is windy and/or you are feeling lethargic from the previous days 12 mile paddle, why not spend all day sitting and hammocking in the shade, sunning, swimming, reading, eating, and watching the boats parade up the channel. The long sunset will entice you out onto the shimmering waters later on.

Return the way you came, it never looks the same going back. * See the expanded and updated 2nd. Edition of Mary Ann Snowden's "Island Paddling" for a full description of this story and many other trips in the Gulf Islands and Barkley Sound.