



As I drifted into consciousness I immediately knew something was wrong. For one, it was far too early – 4:58 am to be exact. And the rhythmic sound of waves that had been a faraway lullaby when I went to sleep now seemed to envelop me. Even the ground, which only seven hours previously had dared us to find a patch devoid of rock seemed suspiciously squishy. I glanced past my two friends wrapped tightly in their sleeping bags and discovered my boots were swimming laps in the tent's vestibule. Sometime in the middle of the night the Pacific Ocean had decided to swallow us whole.

Our adventure had started two days before in Vancouver. Josh, Meghan, Alison, Steph, and I had loaded up our bikes full of pots, pans, sleeping bags, tents, and what seemed like an endless supply of food. Our destination was Porpoise Bay, just north of Sechelt on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast. We had arranged to rent several kayaks for the weekend.

This was to be my first extended biking trip, let alone kayak expedition, and I may have misjudged exactly what to bring as I happily piled more and more weight onto my bike – oblivious to the fact that it would be my overworked and protesting muscles hefting this load up endless hills. My poor 10 speed – of which only 5 gears actually worked – quivered under the added weight of my bulky camera equipment. The bike itself seemed only to be held together by a web of bungee cords and straps crisscrossing my panniers and rack.

The cycling never took us too far from a city or town, so the scenery was often limited to the posterior of whoever was pedaling just ahead of you. Endless hills of asphalt rolled up and down, with distant snow-capped mountains providing the only distraction from cars that hurried by. *Molly's Reach* – of CBC's *Beachcombers* fame – provided us with our last civilized meal before we plunged into our kayaks.

The world looks, and feels different from the cockpit of a kayak. From my vantage point I could see the Tantalus Mountains stooping low to meet the sea. Groups of seals basking in the sun or else playing in the sun-flecked waters beside us. The smell of salt and kelp and sea all mixed into one was a heady rush as we sliced effortlessly through the water.

For lunch we dragged our kayaks ashore and took shelter from a light wind that was re-sculpting the sand and whitecapping the waves. Alison prepared a feast of sun-dried tomato and artichoke heart sandwiches, which I savoured from my perch overlooking the water.

Alas, it was soon time to move on and brave an open stretch of water before camping for the night. We crossed Salmon Inlet amidst conditions that would scare a canoe back to Algonquin – whistling wind, and crashing waves made every effort to retard our progress, but to no avail. Our kayak steeds still bore us swiftly on.

Kunechin Point was to be our undoing. We hauled our kayaks far up the beach in late afternoon and made camp for the night.

Twisted steel cables lay rotting on the beach, brittle to the touch, serving as shattered reminders of a transient forest industry. Our tents lay dangerously close to the creeping tide line – caught between the lapping tongue of the ocean and the cedars standing sentinel behind us. Just how dangerously close we would not find out till morning.

The sound of a babbling brook played backup to a chorus of crows and seagulls. Even the seals got into the act, a choir of dozens snorting and sniffing the air. The water runs cold and clear in these parts, revealing the sea stars and scurrying crabs deep below as they rush home to through the swaying forests of kelp. The tangled beds themselves nap just below the surface, only waking from their dozings to bid the sun hello.

Late afternoon turned into early evening and early evening to night. As the night passed the tide crept higher and higher until 4:58 am when I awoke.

A mad scramble ensued as we tried to move the tent higher, but were blocked by the trees. In the chaos Steph managed to empty her water bottle all over our sleeping bags, which till this point had been kept dry due to the tub design of my Mountain Hardwear tent. By 5:02 am the decision had been made to strike the camp and pile groggily into our kayaks, as we had run out of beachfront property upon which to retreat.

As we drifted away from the camp the predawn light cloaked the water and mountains before us in an even glow. Soon ribbons of light began to play across the perfectly still surface, and the peaks warmed with the early morning sun. As I paddled slowly into the rising dawn I felt a grin spread across my face. If it hadn't been for our foolhardy tent placement I would never have gotten to experience the wonderful serenity of kayaking before the rest of the world has woken up.

