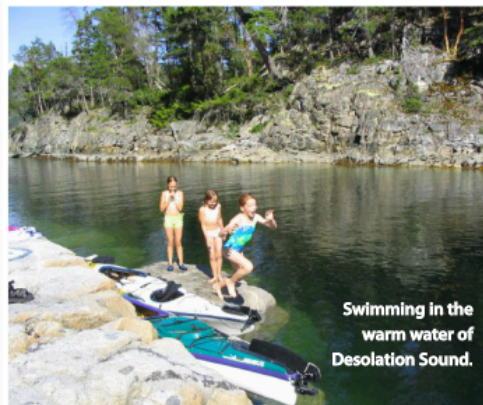
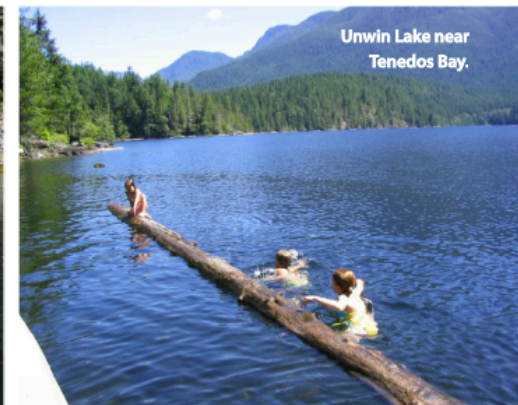




Kayaking
Desolation Sound.



Swimming in the
warm water of
Desolation Sound.



Unwin Lake near
Tenedos Bay.

Watery Delights on Desolation Sound

Despite the bleak name, a family of kayakers found paradise in this remote marine park.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SUZANNE MORPHET

COULD CAPTAIN GEORGE Vancouver have picked a name that was less inviting than Desolation Sound?

"Our residence here was truly forlorn," he scribbled on June 25, 1792, about his ship's anchorage in the large inlet that pushes into the Coast Mountains north of Vancouver, British Columbia. "The steep rocky shores prevented the use of the seine, and not a fish at the bottom could be tempted to take the hook."

Hunger can certainly color one's outlook. But we were pretty sure we weren't going to face that problem; my husband, 11-year-old daughter, and I had stuffed our double and single kayaks with fresh fruit, veggies, cheese, and chocolate before we pushed off shore at Okeover Inlet one summer morning.

The next day we awoke to a low tide and a rocky beach littered with

oysters, ready to be pried open and slurped raw, or fried up in butter and garlic. We definitely wouldn't be going hungry.

A mid-morning paddle around the tiny Curme Islands, our base for the week, revealed another pleasant surprise: only one other group of campers. Desolation Sound is only 100 miles north of Vancouver and easy to get to. In the summer, upwards of 10,000 boats visit Desolation Sound. But those are mostly all yachties and sailors, who sleep on their boats.

Even with the marine traffic, the area still feels remote. Parts of the Sound were designated provincial marine parks in 1973 and no restaurants or lodges spoil the wilderness (with the exception of a refueling stop and store at Refuge Cove).

Kayakers have more recently discovered the area's charms: the snow-

capped mountains framing the eastern horizon, the numerous islands and snug coves that invite exploration, waterfalls that plunge straight down mountainsides, pristine lakes, and—the part we much anticipated—warm ocean water. Most of the Pacific in this part of the world is frigid year-round, but water in the sheltered Sound can reach up to 78 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer, reputedly the warmest water north of Mexico on the coast.

Even though we wouldn't risk hypothermia if we flipped, we brought a VHF radio to listen to the weather forecasts each day. But for some reason—perhaps complacency induced by one beautiful day after another—we didn't listen to the marine forecast the day we decided to explore Prideaux Haven.

The Haven is particularly attractive, a maze of narrow channels and islands. After lunch and a swim, we found a smooth rock to soak up the sun and read. When it was time to leave the protected cove, we were surprised to encounter a howling wind. Whitecaps rolled across the large bay separat-

ing us from our campsite. Evening was approaching, so we couldn't wait out the gale. Crossing, and possibly flipping, wasn't appealing either.

We noticed several large motorboats had taken shelter behind a nearby island. One boater agreed to tow us in our kayaks back to camp. "Better safe than sorry," I mumbled sheepishly. Safely back at camp, I promised myself not to become one of those kayakers who disdains motorboats!

As lovely as swimming in the ocean is, after a few days we were ready to rinse off the salty grime, so one morning we paddled to Tenedos Bay and met up with some friends who cruise to Desolation Sound every summer. From there, we hiked for 10 minutes to Unwin Lake, another unspoiled gem.

On our paddle back to camp, my husband let out his fishing line. Nothing. Not a single bite. Maybe Captain Vancouver got that part right. But his overall assessment of this watery paradise was, thankfully, way off the mark. ■

WHEN YOU GO

Information about Desolation Sound can be obtained from BC Parks. (www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/desolation)

Kayak rentals and tours are available at Okeover Inlet from Powell River Sea Kayak. (604-483-2160; www.bcseakayak.com)

You can also access Desolation Sound from Vancouver Island. Kayak rentals and tours are provided by Spirit of the West Adventures. (800-307-3982; www.kayakingtours.com)

Refuge Cove has waterfront dining in the summer and a general store to restock supplies. (www.refugecove.com)

