

THE ADVENTURES OF

“Let’s go to Desolation Sound” was a conversation we had in late spring. It was an exciting and slightly overwhelming adventure to dream about, given that we would be sailing over 100 miles north of Vancouver in our 20-foot sailboat.

Once the decision was made, Jeff began figuring out our trip plan and I began figuring out a food menu for 21 days, 17 of them with us together on the boat. *Chateau*, our little boat works perfectly for us. She can be sailed from the cockpit without the need to climb up front, has a trusty inboard diesel engine, and has a surprisingly comfortable interior despite her tiny size. We have everything we need on board to “glamp” comfortably. People always ask if the boat has been adapted for us, given we both have spinal cord injuries and limited mobility. The brilliant thing about *Chateau*, a Horizon Cat, made by Com-Pac yachts in Florida, is she is just well designed and we had no need to make any changes to her.

There are some challenges with long trips, however, including limited storage space, no refrigeration, no flush toilet, and living in a very small space with another person for weeks at a time. We’ve managed to work out most of these issues by bringing just the essentials, dehydrating all of our food, using a camping toilet, and being very organized. We do make space for all of the essentials though, including a guitar, ukulele, iPad, plush duvet, a slingshot, two inflatable kayaks and paddles, Scrabble, excellent coffee, Jeff’s crutches, and my wheelchair. Anything that doesn’t spark joy or have a purpose is left behind.

In prepping for our Desolation Sound trip, we decided that we would be self-sufficient for 17 days. That meant bringing all of our food along with us. Given that we weren’t sure we would find fresh produce and wheelchair accessible shops along the way, that meant cooking and dehydrating delicious food for our entire trip. I spent three weeks prepping and ended up with four shopping bags of food, including snacks. We had yummy meals—including ratatouille, lentil dahl, stews, veggie chili, lemon citrus salad, scrambled eggs, and oatmeal—and brownies for dessert.

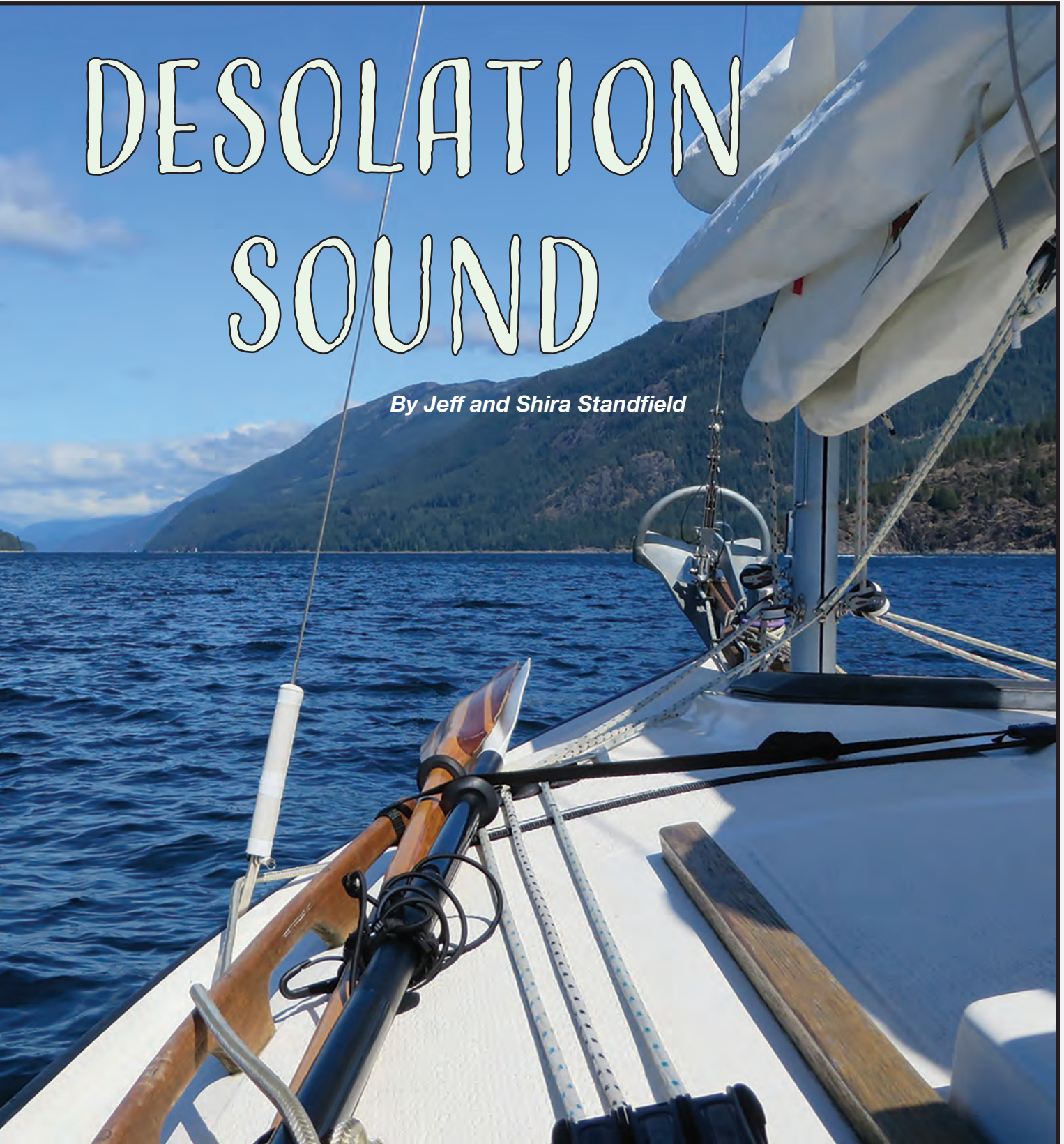
Together, Jeff and I have all boating departments covered. He’s the engine mechanic, trip planner, anchor, and dock lines guy; I’m the cook, sailor, perfect anchoring spot finder, and VHF radio gal. We both work together to make trip decisions based on the weather forecast, tides, and currents. Jeff is able to stand and climb up front to drop and lift anchor as well as flake the sail and tie it down. By necessity, he has become skilled at docking the boat, so there’s



THE POCKET YACHT

DESOLATION SOUND

By Jeff and Shira Standfield





no need for either of us to jump off when we approach a dock. We do get funny looks when we pull up to a fuel dock at a marina and don't stand up. There is usually a look of confusion from the people at the fuel dock when we ask the attendant if it would be OK for us to pay without getting off the boat because "neither of us can walk." We always wink at each other when we see the "confused" look and we also smile when we get our bill for a bit of diesel fuel, usually around six dollars. It amazes me that some power boaters pay hundreds of dollars each time they fuel up.

Chateau has provided me with an opportunity to stow my wheelchair for several weeks and enjoy sailing adventures without being "disabled" by barriers. I feel connected to my whole body while I'm on the boat, as my legs follow me as I move around. There's no need to stand. In fact, standing is awkward on a tiny boat. With a few extra pieces of adaptive equipment, including a gel cushion with straps for moving around without a wheelchair, a grabber for reaching things without having to go below, and an inflatable cushion to protect my skin while transferring out of the kayak onto the boat, I've dialed in what's needed to make my cruising adventure comfortable and safe.

Jeff and *Chateau* left Vancouver on July 15th and made their way north up the Sunshine Coast, where we met up on the 19th. He had the opportunity to visit with family and have a few days to himself on the boat. I took the ferry and then the bus up to Madeira Park and we started our trip together from Pender Harbour. Of course it was low tide with a very steep and sketchy ramp down to the dock. We had to do a bit of problem solving in order for me to get my wheelchair down to the boat without an incident that would have quickly ended our trip. We spent the afternoon

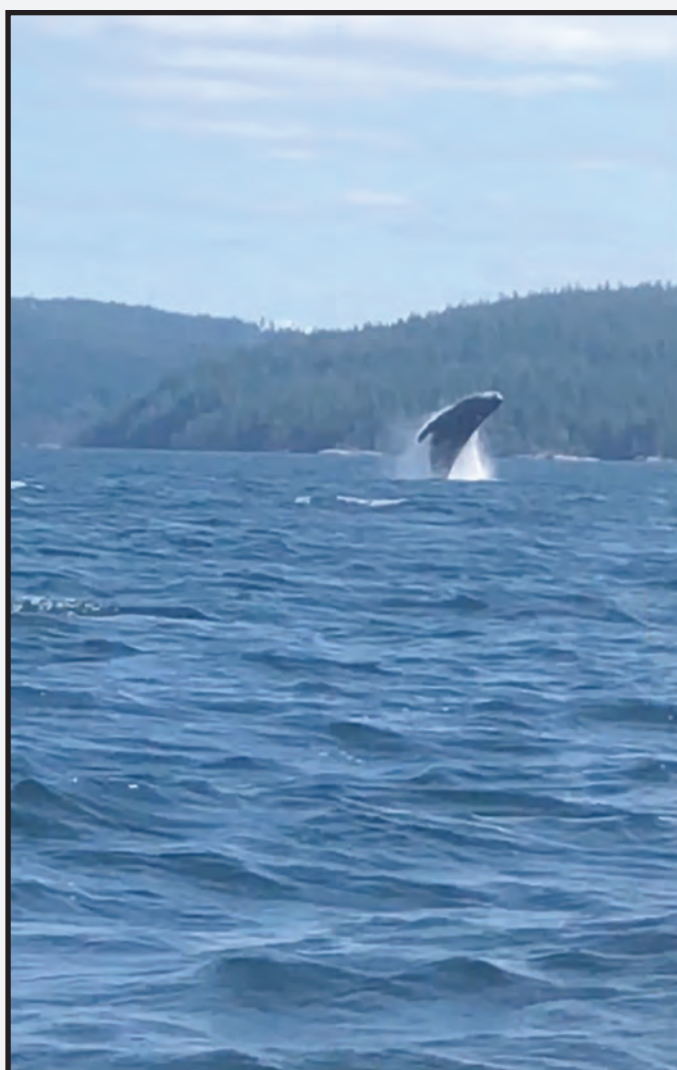


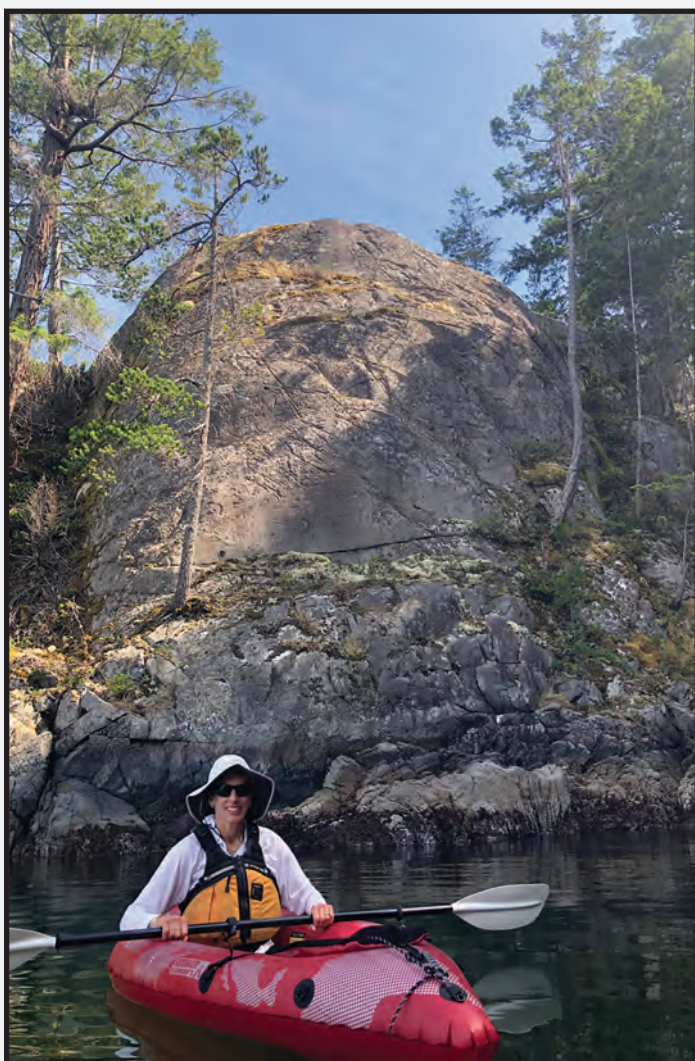
anchored in Pender Harbour and paddled our inflatable kayaks while investigating some of the interesting sites.

The next day we were off on our adventure as we started to make our way up the coast towards Desolation Sound. We started to develop our routine: make morning coffee and oatmeal, check the weather, clean up, get organized, lift anchor, and head off. We liked to arrive at our next anchor spot by around 3 p.m. so we would have enough time to inflate the kayaks, paddle, swim, explore the bay, dry off, have dinner, and perhaps have a game of Scrabble and plan our next day. The beauty of cruising is in its simplicity—experiencing the elements, enjoying the scenery and wildlife, listening to the water and wind, having time to think, having few responsibilities, and limited screen time.

We spent the next couple of days making our way up to the town of Lund, the end of the Sunshine Coast Highway. We were able to squeeze into a tiny spot at the marina and dug out my wheelchair and Jeff's crutches. We certainly got a few surprised looks from people as we made our way up the ramp toward the marina office. That night we had a lovely dinner at a little restaurant with a deck overlooking the marina and a shower in an almost accessible public shower, which was a pleasant and welcome surprise.

The next day was quite exciting as we rounded the point to finally enter Desolation Sound. We were treated to the money shot, the view of the sound with stunning mountains in the background, the view that is shown on all guidebooks to the area. It was quite spectacular and we were thrilled that we had made it all the way there. We found a little bay, anchored, and had a lovely paddle that evening, checking out the little islands in our bay. Chili dinner that night tasted especially good.





The next few days were spent meeting up with friends on another boat in Prideaux Haven, paddling, swimming, and enjoying the view of the gorgeous cliffs at Tenedos Bay. Although there were quite a few large and even enormous yachts in some of the bays, little *Chateau* only draws 2.5 feet, so we were able to tuck into shallow and private areas and avoid the fray.

My favourite day was our visit to the waterfall in Teakerne Arm. On our way up to the falls we spotted a humpback whale feeding. The wind was strong that day, so we had an exciting sail to the falls. The falls are situated in a horseshoe-shaped cliff and we were able to get fairly close to them in the boat. The wind picked up even more on our sail back to Refuge Cove and we had some excitement in hoisting the sail and setting our course in the strong wind. Just as we were nearing Refuge Cove we spotted another humpback whale breaching off in the distance. It was getting closer to us, putting on a spectacular display jumping and splashing down into the water. Jeff was able to capture it on video and we were able to share our experience with family and friends. It was incredible seeing a whale while being under sail in such a beautiful place.

That evening we found a private little bay in Refuge Cove and had a lovely late-evening paddle exploring the area. There was a restaurant in the Cove, but there was a long staircase up to the building, so we feasted on delicious lentil dahl meal on the boat instead. We ended off the evening with quick swim and wash in the bay.

Our last day in Desolation was quickly approaching, but we were excited to be meeting up with friends and their 41-foot yacht in Grace Harbour. They were just starting their Desolation trip and we were just finishing. They were already anchored when we pulled up beside them and



tied up to their boat. We felt so tiny compared to them, as we couldn't even see up and into their boat. I wasn't able to transfer up the four feet to get up and into their yacht, so all three of them climbed down and dined with us on *Chateau*. It was so crowded that I had to sit down in the cabin to make room, but we had lots of fun and stayed up until the mosquitos ended our evening. Jeff and I seem to think *Chateau* is bigger than she is until we see her next to other boats. What we love about her is that she is tiny, but tough and stable and able to take us where everyone else gets to go.

After two weeks on the boat, it was time to say goodbye to Desolation Sound and make our way back to Vancouver. We treated ourselves to shore leave in Lund, as well as at Grief Point near Powell River, which included laundry, showers, and meals on land. Our second to last day was exciting as we rounded Gower Point, on our way into Gibsons Harbour. The wind had picked up and our last hour of sailing was quite epic for us. *Chateau* was fighting the gusts and we both had our hands on the wheel to keep her headed downwind. Jeff's uncle and aunt saw us heading for shore in front of their place, unaware that we were struggling to keep her heading through the channel and not up on the beach. It was too late to reef, so after an exhausting hour we managed to round the next point and, with some shelter from the wind, lower the sail and head in.

Our sail back to Vancouver from Gibsons the next day was equally exciting with us surfing large waves from Point Atkinson all the way back to Kits Beach. We pulled into False Creek that afternoon, exhilarated and proud of the incredible adventure we'd had together, independently on a 20-foot boat. We are already talking about where to go next summer. 

