

Seeking the Karaka

2006 SCOUT TURNBULL FAMILY AWARD WINNERS



In the summer of 2006, after a year of planning and preparation, the 1st Douglas (BC) Scout Troop took a fun and exciting trip to the Southern Gulf Islands on British Columbia's coast.

The idea for the trip arose when the troop was taking its annual fall hike from Sidney to Victoria, BC. While marching along the intertidal zone revealed by low tide, the Scouts commented on how close some of the neighboring islands appeared, and began debating how long a canoe crossing might take. One question

led to another: "Can we camp on any of these islands?" "What would we do for water?" and soon ended with "All right, when are we going?"

Investigations revealed good news as well as some formidable challenges. Several of the islands had camping available. But we were looking at some long crossings of cold saltwater, subject to fast currents and choppy water if the weather went bad. This trip called for the highest levels of planning and preparation.

Optimal weather for a trip like this is late summer, so the troop had about a year to get ready. Victoria has a number of sheltered bays and cover to practice in, giving us a feel for wave action we had never encountered before on freshwater. The troop

also honed its outdoor skills with regular outings.

Gradually, plans for our expedition began to take shape. When canoeing from one island to another in open water, nothing means more than the weather. The troop knew from experience that a change in the wind direction could turn a fun two-hour jaunt into an exhausting four-hour slog. If we wanted to be safe and have fun, flexibility was the key. We had to be prepared to move out, stay put, or change plans if the weather said so. For this reason we designed two trip plans, taking advantage of the currents and prevailing winds. Things were looking good, and then they got better. Finding out about the *Turnbull Family Adventure Challenge*



Getting ready to leave. How will all this gear fit into these canoes?



A beautiful day for the paddle back to Salt Spring Island.

Photos: Vicky Killian

Award, we now had an even better reason for this trip. (See sidebar for requirements.)

A Theme is Set

While planning the trip, the troop was amazed to find out some of the islands had been settled by Hawaiian immigrants who called themselves "Kanaka". A book on their history was available at the local library, and a call to author Tom Koppel put us in touch with Dave Roland, a Salt Spring Island resident and Kanaka descendent. Mr. Roland graciously agreed to meet with us during our trip. We now had a theme for our expedition: to explore the history, settlements, and water route of the Kanaka! Now, with departure day nearing, all we had left to do was cross our fingers and hope for good weather.

Departure day — light rain and 25 km winds. A call to some waterfront residents confirmed the worst: white cap water too choppy to put a canoe into. It was time for Plan B. The troop would take a ferry to Salt Spring Island and set up a base camp from where we would take shorter trips. Once we arrived at Ruckle Park, the clouds began to clear, hot drinks were made, camp was set up, and spirits began to rise. It was time to start working on our legacy project.

Letterboxing

During the planning phase, the troop had determined that it wanted to leave a memorial to commemorate the event and to honour contributions made by the Kanaka. It was decided to create a letterbox.

Letterboxing is somewhat like geo-caching. Using clues downloaded from the internet, searchers locate a container which holds a notebook and a rubber stamp. Searchers carry a stamp pad, a notebook, and a rubber stamp of their own.

Once the letterbox is located, the finders use their stamp to mark the let-

terbox notebook and the letterbox stamp to mark their own notebook. We spent the afternoon making custom stamps following instructions from: www.letterboxing.org. (See sidebar.)

Seeking the Kanaka

Day two dawned clear and calm, and the troop broke camp after a sturdy breakfast. We struck out for Russell Island, where we landed on a beautiful shell beach after about an hour and a half paddle. Signs on the island told of how Russell Island had once been owned and farmed by the family of Maria Mahoy, one of the better remembered Kanaka. After a brief hike on the tiny island's lone trail, the Scouts enjoyed lunch and then launched for Portland Island.

Although the current was against us, and we had to be careful of the massive ferries passing through, the water was calm and we got to see dolphins, harbour seals, and seabirds during the crossing. Portland Island is part of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve of Canada and is large enough to have three separate campgrounds. We selected a site on the western camp in order to enjoy the maximum sunlight, hiked some of the island's trails, ate supper, and then played card games by lantern until we were ready for sleep.

The next morning one of the Scouts reported seeing raccoons in the camp when she awoke in the night, and we watched an otter family search for food offshore while loading the canoes for our return to Salt Spring Island. Over the next few days we hiked 10km to a Kanaka-built church and cemetery, visited a public market over three and a half hours away by water, and met with Dave Roland, the Kanaka descendent mentioned earlier. Mr. Roland recounted some of this family's fascinating history and honoured us by being the first to stamp our letterbox notebook. We returned to camp where we admired a

large owl perched calmly about 3m up in a tree. The troop put their stamp in the letterbox and hid it before returning to camp for supper. We ate together, laughing and chatting, until someone shouted "Orcas!" We all rushed to the shoreline in time to see a small pod of killer whales pass by about 6m offshore. After the sunset, the Scouts strapped on glow sticks and played 'kick the can' in the dark.

As we took the ferry home the next day, we were all as dirty, tired, and happy as we had ever been. The troop is grateful to the Turnbull Family for making it possible for us to prepare for and complete this adventure without the added burden of fundraising. We hope the award will inspire other troops to attempt a trip that challenges and rewards them like ours did. X
— Scouter Dave Killion, 1st Douglas Scout Troop, British Columbia.

The Turnbull Family Scout Adventure Challenge Guidelines

(For more details on the Award prize money and requirements, travel to Scouts Canada's web site, under Scouts.)

1. The challenge must be based on Scouts researching and then retracing a route of historical significance.
2. The challenge must be at least four days from start to finish.
3. The challenge must include some type of community service component.
4. The challenge should include meeting youth/Scouting members from other cultural communities along the way.
5. Within 30 days of completion of the Challenge, a basic log, including pictures and daily journal entries, must be submitted.

Deadline: **May 1st**

Letterboxing

A "treasure hunt" style outdoor quest, letterboxing combines navigational skills and rubber stamps. Suitable for a wide range of ages, letterboxing can be as simple as directions for a letterbox in your yard, to travelling across the country, following clues. Click on: www.letterboxing.org to explore how to join in the fun.



Dave Roland, a Kanaka descendent — first to stamp our letterbox notebook.



A trip to never forget!