

Rounding Cape Caution

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Image: Towing the Awen around Cape Caution

Just as in rock climbing, every journey, like every ascent, has a “crux” point, a passage through the eye of a needle, a time of greatest struggle or danger. Although I didn’t know it when I got out of our bunk this morning, today was going to be the “crux” point of our journey south.

We had anchored for the night in Kwakume Bay. We were expecting to cross the mouths of Rivers and Smith Inlets and anchor up in Jone's Cove for an early start around Cape Caution the next morning. However, things didn't quite work out the way we had planned.

During most of our trip south, we had been travelling sandwiched between two weather systems – a strong southeasterly storm to our north over Hecate Strait, and a northwesterly gale to our south over Johnstone Strait and adjacent areas. Where we were, the weather was confused and unpredictable. We kept expecting to be caught by one system or the other, but each day we managed to travel a little farther south. Today started out in the same sort of unexpected way – calm and still, when we expected it to be windy and rough. We crossed Rivers Inlet and still no real wind. Patches of fog came and went, hovering on the horizon or suddenly looming out of nowhere. So we kept going, and crossed Smith Inlet. It was still early in the day, but we expected the wind to come up, and so we headed for Jone's Cove, where we could wait out the afternoon's wind. And sure enough, just as we were getting close to our destination, the wind did start to come up. The seas got rougher, and the *Awen* started jerking at her tow line. We had several safety lines set up to take the stress when the *Awen* started getting headstrong like this, but one-by-one, we watched as each one snapped. Finally the main tow line broke with a distinct twang, leaving the *Awen* drifting behind us. For a moment we stood watching in shocked silence, then jammed into adrenaline-charged overdrive. When it was all done, we had the *Awen* safely recaptured and under tow (albeit very slowly) again. I hardly remember leaping around from boat to boat in rough seas, tying lines, trying to keep the boats from crashing together, but somehow this all happened when it needed to. Ken commented dryly that I had just participated in my first deep sea salvage operation.

We limped slowly into Jone's Cove. I, for one, was happy to be out of the building seas. We fixed up the tow line situation as best we could, substituting a length of chain for the section of tow line that we had lost. I wasn't sure it would work, and we were down to the last, rather too short, piece of tow line that we had. I guess necessity is the mother of invention, as the saying goes.

Looking forward to a quiet afternoon to relax my stressed nerves, I discovered that the weather had something else in mind for us. The wind dropped, and the seas quieted. However, this was apparently not going to last long, as the forecast predicted the winds were going to come up stronger than ever for the next day. We had a window of opportunity to get around Cape Caution now, while the wind was down. So, with great apprehension on my part, fearing another towline episode while we were in the very open and exposed waters off of Cape Caution, we headed off.

Surprisingly, the water was nearly glassy calm when we started out. However, the fog came in thick, and we had to use the radar to navigate. In this cotton-candy world, we ploughed along. It was hard to tell where we were or where we were going, but at one point I caught a glimpse of the waves surging against the headlands of Cape Caution. Then the fog closed in again. As predicted, the winds did start picking up, and the swell gradually got larger and larger. Fearing more problems with the towline, we headed for Miles Inlet. After some tense moments as we surfed through shallow waters at the mouth of the inlet, we found a safe and quiet anchorage. I was thankful after

an unexpected rounding of Cape Caution!