



The Islander

## Island Hopping April 20, 2008

Spring shake down! For the second year in a row I did spring maintenance on the *Ronquil* (my faithful skiff) in my driveway. Projects included replacing a bolt on the trailer's front wheel axle, charging the battery, lubing the engines, replacing the spark plugs, replacing the fuel filter, and stocking the emergency kit with fresh candy—not to mention all the scrubbing and other sundry tasks. It mostly went off without a hitch (except for the three hours and two trips to the store to get my fuel hose working...which turned out to be fully functional to start with). But, what can you expect? I spent part of two beautiful weekends in the spring chill getting everything ready, and anxiously awaited opportune weather.

It came on April 20<sup>th</sup>—clear skies, light winds and seas to...well, they were calling for seas to three feet, but I was willing to give that a try! I confess that I was a little nervous, this being a shake down not just of the boat, but also of my skills at towing and launching. My dad bought me a brand new pickup truck in February (thanks Dad!!) providing me the freedom to launch the boat at will without pulling favors from my friends or family...but this meant that I didn't necessarily have anyone along who knew what they were doing!

So with some trepidation, I picked up Chris in the morning and with little effort we got the trailer hooked up and tied down and took off for the boat harbor, the *Ronquil* riding primly behind.

It was still low tide when we arrived at Douglas Harbor, meaning there was more ramp than usual to back down.



The barge



The barge

Amazingly this all went down without a hitch (on my first try!!) and soon I left Chris in charge of the boat while I parked the trailer. A few minutes later we were drinking beers and heading out of the harbor in the sunshine; I was hopelessly gleeful. The blue sky and brilliant white mountains were stunning and the water calm down the channel. We had no real agenda as we headed south, though I confess that were I confronted with flat calm water I surely would have gone all the way to Snettisham! As it was the seas were beginning to kick up in Taku Inlet (and were supposed to build in the afternoon) so I got only got as far as Point Arden before turning around. Instead we headed up to Green Cove on

Admiralty Island to check out the ruins of the Islander and its barge.

So here's the quick story of the Islander, if I remember it correctly. She was a steamship built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and touted as the "first unsinkable ship" due to its double hull and watertight compartments. It was one of the ships that ferried miners to and from Skagway during the gold rush. Apparently the Islander was heading south with a ship full of wealthy miners in 1901 when she hit an iceberg in Stephen's Passage near Douglas Island and went down. (And no, there weren't enough life boats on board for all the passengers.) I think everyone survived, but there were rumors of all that gold left onboard, sitting in 300 feet of water. Around the 1930's some folks raised part of the Islander by positioning two barges over the wreck and sending divers down to hook cables around the hull. As the tide dropped they kept the cables taut, forcing the Islander to rise with the barges as the tide rose. They repeated this process for some days until she reached the surface and was towed to Green Cove. Apparently the venture was unsuccessful (the bow of the Islander where the safe (with all

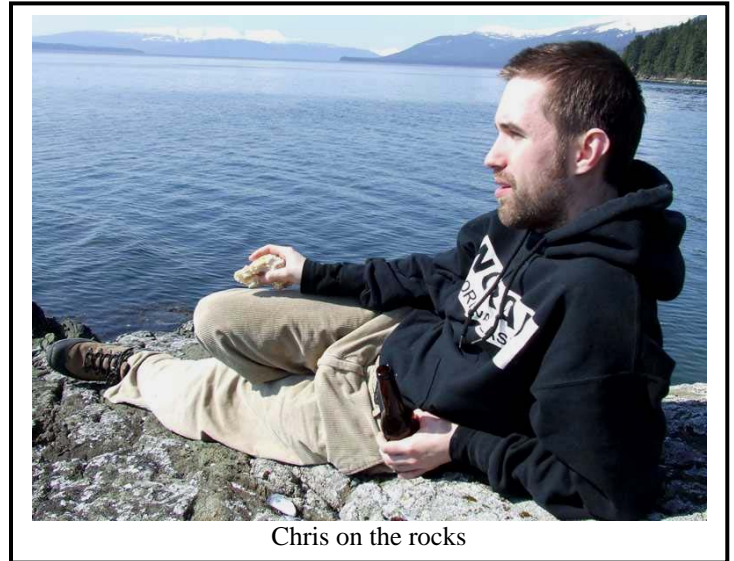


The Islander

the gold?) remains underwater) but the ruins of both the Islander and one of the barges are on the beach. I've told that story to thousands of tourists but had never been ashore. I'm actually a little shaky on my history here, but I think that's more or less accurate!

So Chris and I beached the Ronquil on the rising tide and explored the ruins. The barge was splayed out in decay on the rocky beach, covered in rows and rows of rusting bolts, bundles of wire rope, baby trees and lichen. There was little left of the Islander other than some ribs, unidentifiable scraps of metal, and what looked like a piece of the stern. We checked these out, then walked around Green Cove a little. A pair of Canada geese made a ruckus at the mouth of the creek, but there wasn't much other wildlife except a pair of skittish sea lions we passed on the way in.

From there we headed over to the back side of Douglas and came up on a smooth gravel beach half way to Point Hilda. Leaving the Ronquil anchored to the beach, we hiked over to a nearby rocky point and took in the sun and the view. Perfection! When the breeze came up we finished our beer and cruised back to town. The trailering went similarly well (though we struggled a little to get the boat square on the trailer as one of the rollers is off whack). All in all a successful shake down and a brilliant start to summer!



Chris on the rocks



The good life, Douglas Island