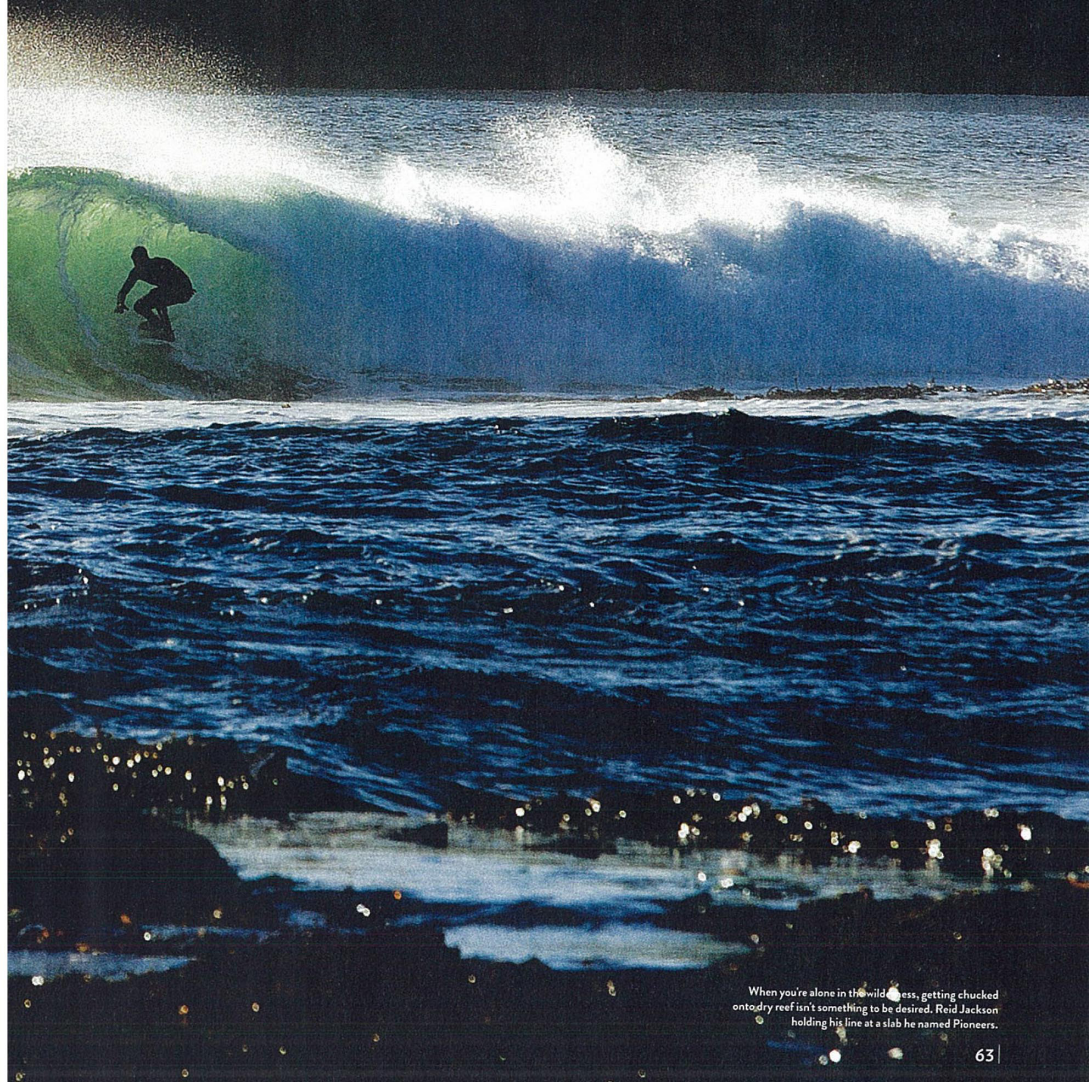


by Arran Jackson | Photos by Kyler Vos

EQUINOX

An Autumnal Journey in Haida Gwaii



When you're alone in the wild, getting chucked onto a reef isn't something to be desired. Reid Jackson holding his line at a slab he named Pioneers.



Scouting the coast. No surf schools or beachfront resorts in these parts.

I. TWO WEEKS OF EXPLORATION

There's a place off the coast of B.C. enveloped by a mist of legend and tradition. Isolated from the mainland and swamped with nature's bounty, it's a place where the weather changes by the minute, yet the land stands still for centuries. The people are strong, proud and charismatic. There's a visible connection between the land and the people, rooted at the feet and budding through the hands and mind. ¶ As a child, I remember hearing stories of vast lands and untamed seas, where people of oceanic and supernatural origins built a culture rich in history. Last fall, Peter Devries, my brother, Reid, and myself had the pleasure of taking a trip there—to Haida Gwaii, the "Islands of the People." We were to conduct a surf expedition to some of the most remote and untapped coastline in the world, with a mission to spend two

weeks exploring as much as we possibly could. This was more than just a surf trip, it was a journey to experience this wild and rugged coast. ¶ The first rule of surf exploration

YOU ALSO NEED TO BE AWARE THAT THE PLACES YOU VISIT AND EXPLORE ARE NOT YOURS TO USE AS THROW-AWAY INFORMATION AND HOT PARTY GOSSIP.

is you have to be careful with whom you talk about surf exploration. It's not like you're being protective or trying to claim rights to the spots. It's more like backcountry skiing compared to riding at your local hill; while there are the rewards of scoring, there has to

be an awareness of the inherent risks involved. Even the most experienced backcountry skiers cause avalanches. In fact, the more you get out there and the more confident you are, the greater the risk of putting yourself in compromising positions to get your fix. Even when the visible risk factors are low, there's no such thing as zero risk. ¶ You also need to be aware that the places you visit and explore are not yours to use as throw-away information and hot party gossip. The names given for spots in this story are fabricated and don't reflect the traditional names given to them by the Haida centuries ago. We were fortunate to be able to visit the places we did, and it took a lot of researching and asking for permission to be allowed access. Rarely visited, this was not a place any surf junkie was allowed to tramp on. ☉



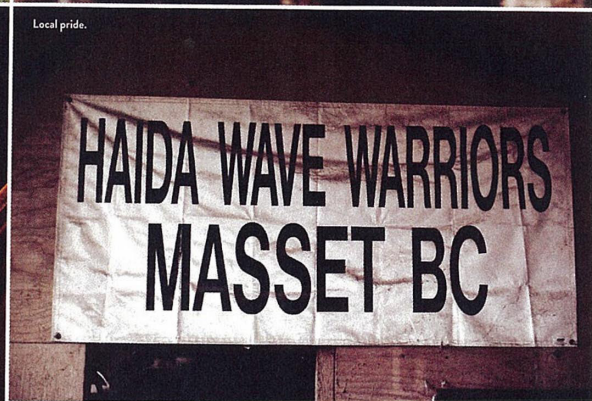
Nothing but net.



Omnivore.



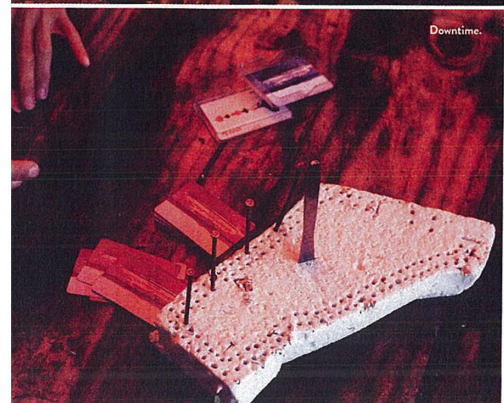
Living tradition.



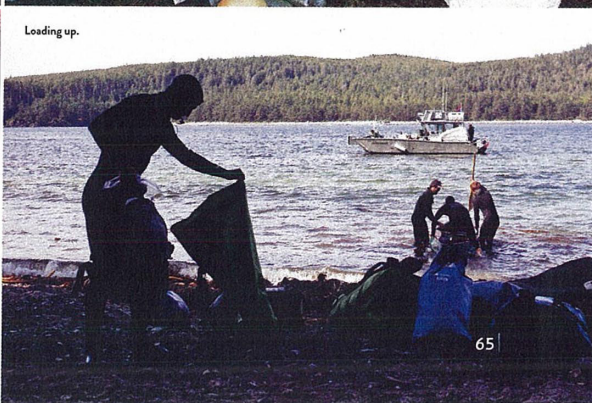
Local pride.



Modernity is inescapable.



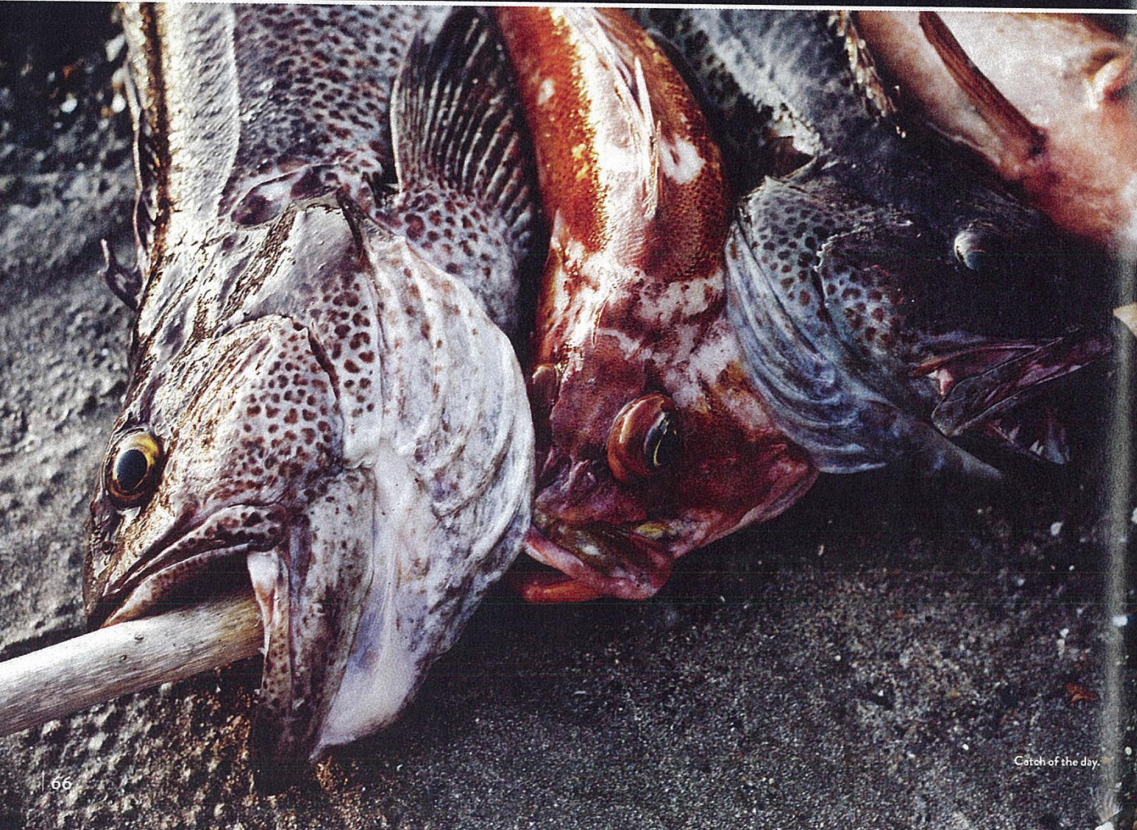
Downtime.



Loading up.



The North Pacific has some of the richest waters on the planet. Pete Devries and Reid hunting for edible treasure.



Catch of the day.

THE ABUNDANCE OF EDIBLE PRODUCTS THE LAND AND SEA HAD TO OFFER WAS INCREDIBLE.

II. SUNSHINE AND OOLICHAN OIL

Selecting a time for a trip is crucial. In a perfect world, we'd have unlimited time and resources to score good waves. We didn't quite have that luxury—as most people with real lives don't—so we picked a time that has a mix of fair weather and lots of daylight, plus the North Pacific waking from its summer slumber: *Equinox*. ☐ The area we picked for the journey had potential for different types of surf, as well as possible fishing holes and a camp spot to hunker down from bad weather. We packed as many supplies as we could,

including a full range of surfboards, a small Zodiac for exploring and a lightweight canoe for fishing. What followed was the best weather and camping setup any of us had experienced on the West Coast—two weeks of sunshine, surfing, fishing and exploring with a solid crew. Somehow, we lucked into the best stretch of weather Haida Gwaii had seen in 47 years. ☐ The high pressure made for ideal camping, but unfortunately, less than desirable swell to make all surf conditions a blast, we had a

coastline to discover, and we had games to fill our days. It was a good thing we brought a longboard; even knee-high dribblers were surfed as we took turns logging hours in the marine land. ☐ We fished every day and feasted off fresh cod and chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms doused in the oolichan oil that was gifted to us for our trip. The abundance of edible products the land and sea had to offer was incredible. Our carefully planned menu became a backup supply of snacks instead of being essential to our survival. ●



Take care of the sea, the sea takes care of you.

III. MOSSY AWESOME

You'd think the farther you went from human civilization, the less impact you'd see. In fact, the farther we traveled, the more we saw. While we did our best to gather as much plastic as we could, the task was daunting. We could've spent a month gathering the plastic on the beach and still not have gotten it all. Although the amount of washed-up garbage got us down, we did find a few ways to use the waste. We made a basketball hoop from an old trap, hammock cities from fishing nets, and minigolf courses with a floater ball and our splitting axe. There were soccer games, cribbage boards and even a set of hockey gloves we used to carry hot rocks from the fire to the drift sauna.

Behind our campsite, the forest was unreal. Dominated by Sitka spruces, it was carpeted by moss that was, in some areas, armpit-deep. The introduction of deer to Haida Gwaii has caused major problems to the ecosystem. With no natural predators to keep their population in check, they graze out all the underbrush, leaving only moss in its place. While this was so aesthetically pleasing we described it as 'mossy awesome,' it leaves the soil weak and has caused huge trees that have stood for eons to be victims of windfall. Most of our surfs happened right in front of our campsite, at a place we named Wedge Town due to the potential for wedges as the tide filled over the bar.

Peter made good use of the small peelers to launch aerials as a daily routine. Out on the point was a crazy slab that was oh-so-close to being perfect—minus the rock shelf at the end that sucked every barrel dry. After hours of staring at the slab at all tides, hoping a slight shift in conditions would make it rideable, Pete and Reid gave it a go on a lower tide. While they traded boiling, step-down drops, only Reid managed to sneak into a couple of inside drainers, probably the only waves that actually barreled in the whole session. How he managed to weave his way through and make it out was crazy given the circumstances, and he dubbed the slab "Pioneers." Around the

corner, we found a lefthand cobblestone wave that was blocked by outer reefs and highly tide-dependent. It would turn on for half an hour, once a day, as the tide filled to just the right height, and we enjoyed long, mushy peelers that were best suited to fishes and longboarding. As the days wore on, we expanded our surf exploration north and south via our Zodiac, and found a couple of other interesting possibilities. To the south was another slab that Pete located. At first glance, it didn't even look like a wave, but to his well-trained eye, there was potential. Sure enough, as the tide changed, a Cyclops was born. But when Pete paddled out to give it a closer look, a group of aggressive sea lions held him off the peak. The

let us bask in comfort and explore the terrain. Searching new places is a thrill in itself. Obviously, if we'd scored two weeks of uninterrupted, pulsing swell this would've been a different kind of story. But the act of making calculated guesses at coastline potential—and following through with a journey—is all about the process and how you make the best of your time. Our Haida Gwaii trip wouldn't have been possible without the help of many. I'd like to thank Christian White for receiving us in his longhouse and workspace, his patience in answering our many questions and for us giving us permission to spend time in his ancestral land; Nika and Danny for letting us stay in their High Water House, Skwaa Kungst Naay; Gwaliga Hart for helping us understand the significance of the area we visited and helping us make connections with his friends and family; Severn Suzuki and Judson Brown for hosting us, introducing us to their beautiful children, sharing insight into the community and providing us with smoked salmon and oolichan oil that came in handy for our health and well-being; Giindajin Haawasti Guujaaw for taking the time to speak with us, and for his work as leader of the Council of the Haida Nation to secure the protection of the islands as well as pushing for sustainable use of island resources; Nick and

Greg Grzybowski, who let us stay in their family cabin and provided us with their canoe, Zodiac and fishing gear; Highlander Marine Services, Capt. Trent Moraes, his wife, Dana, and Capt. Danny Robertson for our safe travel to and from our destination; Sitka for supporting Reid, Pete and myself, and for having the dedication and drive to see a mission like this become a reality. I'd also like to pay our respects to the land that provided us with food, refuge and many memories in the time we spent there.

Look for the film about this trip, presented by Sitka, to premiere this July. —ed.



Reid in trim.

wave was a mutant and seemed more suitable for tow-assisted surfing, which was beyond our little Zodiac's capabilities. To the north was another beach with a rivermouth, but during a day trip over to it we discovered the sandbanks were non-existent. There were a number of setups that showed promise but didn't quite get the conditions they needed to turn on. Had the swell and tides been different, you never know how they would've turned out. But overall, the trip was a success. We managed to scout out a territory seldom visited by humans and teeming with surf potential, and we got to experience the raw beauty of the coastline in sustained sunshine that

A campsite with waves straight out front. Arran Jackson making the most of a dreamy setup.



Modern performance in a timeless place. Pete boosting at the beachbreak.

