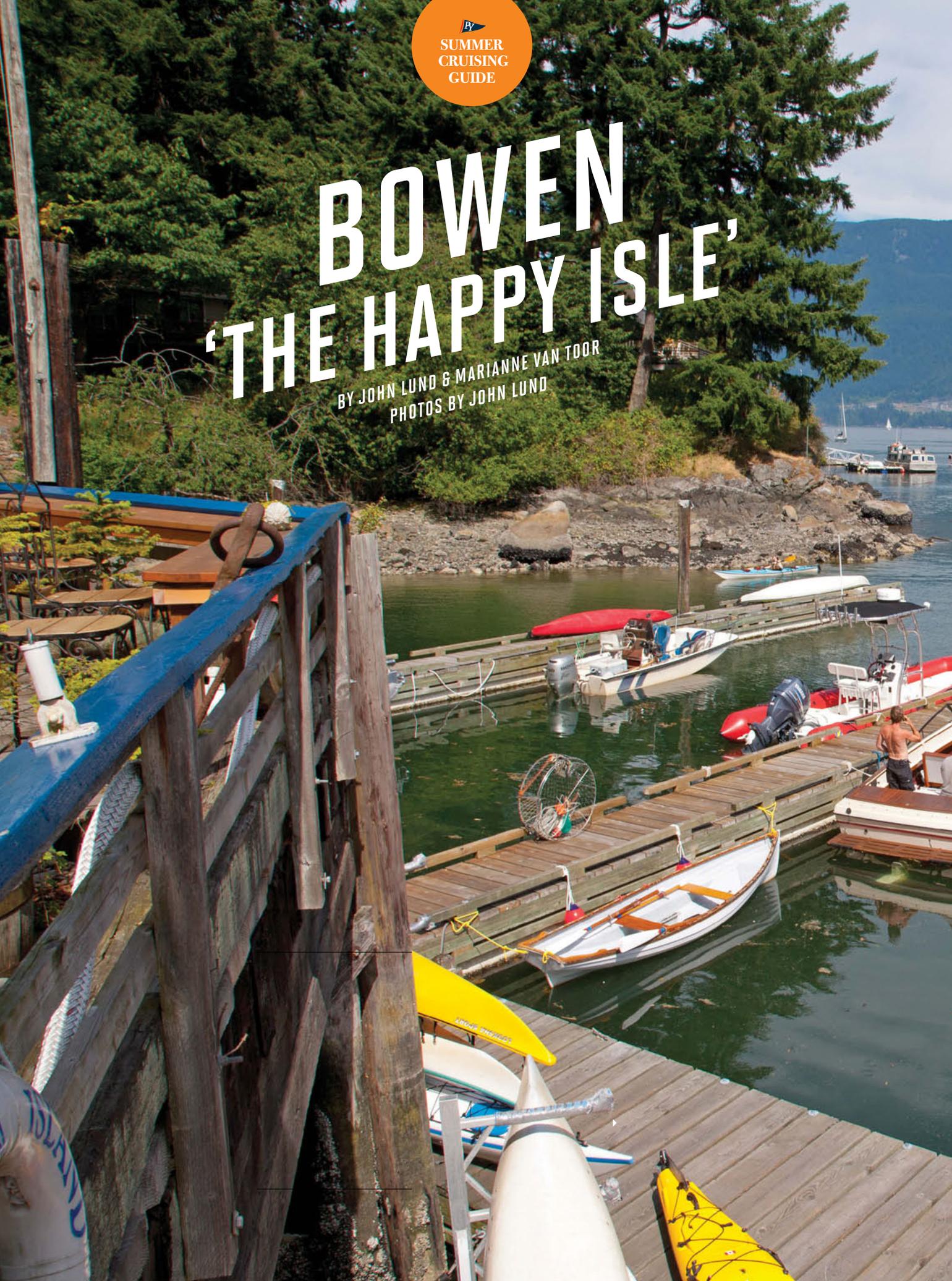


By
SUMMER
CRUISING
GUIDE

BOWEN 'THE HAPPY ISLE'

BY JOHN LUND & MARIANNE VAN TOOR
PHOTOS BY JOHN LUND



The view from Bowen Island Marina looking out toward Howe Sound.



FOR MORE THAN 125 YEARS, BOWEN ISLAND HAS BUILT A REPUTATION AS A RELAXING GETAWAY FOR BOATERS AND LANDLUBBERS ALIKE. TODAY, THE MARINAS AND ATTRACTIONS MAKE IT EVEN MORE ENTICING

WE GOT MORE THAN WE bargained for on our latest trip to Bowen Island's Snug Cove. What we were expecting was the usual laidback ambience of this small historic port at the mouth of Howe Sound. What we received was vintage yachts, classic cars, period fashion shows, an elaborate tea party, music on the dock, and plenty of island history thanks to Bowen Island Steamship Days.

In addition, we were treated to a tour of the Bowen Island Golf Club and managed to enjoy several fine restaurants along the way. By the end of our two-day stay, we decided Bowen Island still deserves 'The Happy Isle' moniker it received in its early 1900s Union Steamship days.

NAVIGATING TO SNUG COVE Located on the east side of Bowen Island, Snug Cove makes an ideal first stop for boaters heading into Howe Sound and along the Sunshine Coast from Vancouver. As it is only 11 miles northwest from Granville Island, we used Snug Cove as a sea trial lunch stop during my yacht sales days in the early 1980s. Today, Vancouver boaters choose it for some island escape time just as they did 100 years ago. Back then, as many as 5,000 weekenders would come out to picnic, dance, party and return home... all for a \$1 ticket. Costs have risen but Snug Cove's two private and one public dock give good value for such a lovely protected harbour.

The busiest times in the cove are the brief moments when the BC Ferry, connecting Bowen Island with Horseshoe Bay on the mainland, makes its hourly runs unloading and loading vehicles and foot passengers. Boaters are advised to stay clear while the ferry enters or exits the bay. Other than ferry traffic, the harbour entrance is free of obstructions.

Snug Cove is a lovely, well-protected harbour.



The funky USSC Marina and an even funkier gentleman out for a stroll.

BOWEN ISLAND MARINA When entering Snug Cove, the Bowen Island Marina docks are on the right. These are busy docks during the summer. Owner-operator Norma Dallas asks that you phone ahead to check availability by calling 604-947-9710.

The marina has 15- and 30-amp shore power. Above the docks on the pier, small shops offer ice cream, coffee, pastries, kayak rentals, fishing licenses, tackle and bait. There is also a history display and, if lucky, you can catch some music on the pier to go with your coffee and treats.

SNUG COVE PUBLIC WHARF The next dock is the BC Ferries landing, followed by the Snug Cove Public Wharf. We suggest you use the public dock to tie up for a brief Snug Cove visit. Tie down the boat securely and have adequate fenders to protect it from ferry wash. Note that the wharf has no water or electricity. For information call 604-328-5499.

UNION STEAMSHIP COMPANY MARINA At the head of the bay is the Union Steamship Company Marina, a modern year-round facility. This is a welcoming spot with guest moorage for boats 20 to 200 feet in length. Contact staff on VHF 66A or call 604-947-0707 to check availability. Guest moorage is found on the outside fingers of E, D, C, B and the inside of A next to the marina building. The south end of A is for seaplanes.

The docks feature water and 30- and 50-amp power. There is no fuel dock in Snug Cove; the closest one is in Horseshoe Bay.

USSC Marina has a unique floating building with marina office and combination chandlery and shop on the bottom deck and a very nice upper lounge with a wide screen TV, computer station, free internet access, washrooms, showers and laundry surrounded by tasteful nautical appointments. We happened by the lounge last summer when Germany was playing Argentina for the FIFA World Cup, and the place was rocking... literally.

There is overnight anchorage in neighbouring Mannion (Deep) Bay, a few minutes dinghy distance from Snug Cove village.

EXPERIENCING SNUG COVE To properly experience Bowen Island's Snug Cove and surrounding area we need to know some history on how it got this way. See the sidebar on page 35 for a brief history and the influence of steamships in its early development.

When you first arrive, visit the Bowen Island Tourist Information Centre at 432 Cardena Road (behind the Library,

originally the Union Steamship Company store) and pick up the excellent Heritage Walking Tour brochure. It guides you along a 2.5-kilometre walk that will have you visualizing what it was like in the 1920s when the USSC resort became known as "the people's playground."

To add to Bowen's historical flavour, there are info panels erected along the island's trails. Allow two hours to wander through Crippen Park, explore the Davies Orchard and its 12 remaining cottages and the Bowen Island Heritage Museum, and

stop in at the Bowen Island Museum & Archives at 1014 Miller Road.

If the crew is hungry for more than the good old days, you don't have to walk very far from the marina to Doc Morgan's Pub & Restaurant. Joining us on the patio deck for Saturday lunch are island locals, Bruce and Dorene Russell and colleague-photographer Maria Steernburg. Between delicious courses of seafood chowder, fish and chips, salads and tasty draft beers, the conversation covers Bowen history, marine photography and the Bowen Island ▶



The SS *Lady Alexandra* was commissioned in 1923 and served as the Union Steamship Company's flagship.



The SS *Bowena* was used by the Terminal Steamship Company in the early 1900s.

Bowen Island—Early History

The First Nations people of the Squamish tribe used Bowen Island as a summer camp to fish and gather shellfish along the shores. They called the land Xwliil'xhwm, or "fast drumming ground."

The island was discovered in 1791 by Spanish explorer Jose Maria Narvaez, who named it Isla de Apodaca. Some 70 years later, a British naval surveyor renamed the

island after Rear Admiral James Bowen, a noted hero of a 1794 victory over the French fleet.

In the 1870s the first Europeans came to fish, farm, log, mine, develop a brickyard and cut cedar shakes.

By the 1890s the first visitors arrived to rent cabins and tents along the shore. Ten years later, Captain John A. Cates bought property on Deep Bay and Snug Cove

where he built a resort for tourists. Cates formed the Terminal Steamship Company and purchased the SS *Britannia*, a 300-passenger steamship, and eventually built a fleet by adding the steamships *Bowena*, *Belcarra*, *Ballenas* and *Baramba*. These ships were smaller, passenger/cargo vessels that ferried company, club and church groups to his Bowen Island retreat.



If You Play

Bowen Island Golf Club (9-holes/public)

Address: 970 Cowan Point Drive,
Bowen Island

Phone: 604-947-4653

CPGA Head Professional: Steve Liddicoat

Course Statistics: 3,003 yards, par 35, 3 tees,
rating 69.2/slope 130 blue tees

Rentals: Clubs, push and power carts

Facilities: Clubhouse, pro shop, coffee shop
and bar

Practice Range: 175 yards, irons only

Information: bowengolf.com

Golf Club that Bruce took a lead role in developing as president of the Bowen Island Golf Association. As an added treat, we watch the lawn in front of Doc's fill with classic Model A Fords, part of the Steamship Days celebration.

Other restaurants nearby include Bowen's newest Rustique Bistro (crepes and waffles), The Snug Café (all day breakfast), Tuscany (pizza and excellent Mediterranean cuisine) and the Bowen Island Pub (burgers and beer). Another kilometre takes you to Artisan Square and the Artisan Eats Café & Bakery (great chocolate croissants and coffee) plus the incredible Cocoa West Chocolatier where Marianne suffers a culinary paroxysm while eating one of its chocolate truffles—the best she has ever tasted.

If the boat needs provisioning, you will find what you need at the busy Snug Cove General Store (also a liquor agency), The Ruddy Potato (organic groceries) or the Bowen Beer & Wine Cellar; all within walking distance of the marinas.

BOWEN ISLAND GOLF CLUB The highlight of our trip, at least for this boating golfer, is a personalized tour of the Bowen Island Golf Club. Escorted by Bruce Russell, Marianne and I cruise all nine-holes of the rolling cut-out-of-the-woods course via golf cart, taking photos along the way. If you are at all



tempted to play the ancient game, you should give this 3,003-yard, par 35 layout a try. Designed by Russ Olson of Sechelt, the course has three tee boxes for players of all skill levels. Evergreen-lined fairways, dramatic elevation changes, strategic shot-making, natural and man-made hazards, and rolling greens ensure that every player will find the course an exciting, yet fair challenge. Heading down the ninth fairway we get more than the hole's usual stunning view of Howe Sound.

Past the rise of the hill, we see the ninth green surrounded by vintage MG sports cars. In the midst of it all, Maria Sternberg is arranging the classic cars around the putting surface for a photograph. I can't help stealing a few of my own as we head to the Cup Cutter Restaurant for coffee before heading back to the marina. To book a tee time call 604-947-4653. To arrange a ride to the course, check with marina staff and/or the pro shop ahead of time... they will get you there.



Waiting for *Lady Alexandra*.

BOWEN ISLAND STEAMSHIP DAYS

The Bowen Island Steamship Days, held the second weekend of July, is an added bonus for our Snug Cove visit. There is something magical about being enveloped by vintage wooden boats, classic cars, music, history, fine food and friendly folks. For more details on Steamship Days, check steamship-days.com.

HAVING SAMPLED AS MUCH OF Bowen Island as we can in two days, we are happily

tired but content as we depart Snug Cove. In a moment of nostalgia I imagine what it was like to stand on a steamer's deck as she pulls away from the dock. Underfoot I can feel the engine's vibration. Having waved our goodbyes, the ship's whistle sounds then echoes off the hillside. We pick up speed, the breeze grows cool as we pass Snug Point. Snow-capped mountain peaks stand tall behind lovely Howe Sound. With an imaginary \$1 ticket in my pocket and a broad smile on my face, I realize, yes, this is how the Happy Isle earned its name. ☺

Bowen Island— The Union Steamship Era

Cates' successful operation came to the attention of the Union Steamship Company. USSC began its northwest operations in 1889. "The Union," as it was called, was instrumental in development of the B.C. Coast and its fishing, logging, and mining industries. Given a good financial boost supplying the Klondike Gold Rush, USSC's steamer fleet transported passengers, supplies and mail along the B.C. Coast to Alaska.

In 1920, the company bought Cates' Bowen Island property and expanded it by enlarging the hotel, re-naming it Mount Strahan Lodge. Clay tennis courts were added and a saltwater swimming pool was created in Deep Bay by surrounding a swimming area with large logs. Some 100 bungalows and 50 cottages were built in Deep Bay and around the Lagoon. A dance pavilion with a sprung-wood floor, capable of handling 800 dancers, was built on Snug Point near the ferry landing.

"The peoples' playground" proved to be a huge success and, in 1923, the USSC commissioned a new flagship. Named *Lady Alexandra*, she became famous for her Saturday night dance cruises when she would deliver 1,000 passengers to dance and party the night away—all for a \$1 return ticket that included admission to the dance pavilion.

Cars, ferries and roads spelled the end of the steamship era on the coast in the 1950s, and USSC closed down its Bowen Island operations that decade.

Rondy and Dorothy Dike purchased the old Snug Cove Marina and surrounding property in 1985 and ensured that the Union Steamship name remained connected to Bowen Island. In early 2015 they passed the business on to their daughter Oydis Nickle.