

# EDGE OF THE WORLD

STORY BY JENNIFER CHESAK | PHOTOS BY BARBARA BOURNE

Meaty salmon, an out-of-the-way fishing lodge  
and a fleet of Trophy Walkarounds in British Columbia's  
Queen Charlotte Islands are well worth the journey





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ick Roemer wolfs down a bowl of porridge and a plate piled high with bacon, quiche and pancakes smothered in huckleberry jam. Like me, he can't get his breakfast down fast enough—not only because the food is delicious, but because we can't wait to get out on the water, or just outside for that matter.

Steps from the main cabin at Peregrine Lodge, a mist-shrouded, old-growth forest of western hemlock and Sitka spruce engulfs toadstool kingdoms and mossy dens. It's the stuff J.R.R. Tolkien dreamt up. But the fantasy that truly lures folks all the way to the northern end of British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands is the fishing. "It's the last frontier," says Paul Laurie, who partnered with Dave Husby of Husby Forest Products to open Peregrine. "Every fish headed down the coast goes past our front door."

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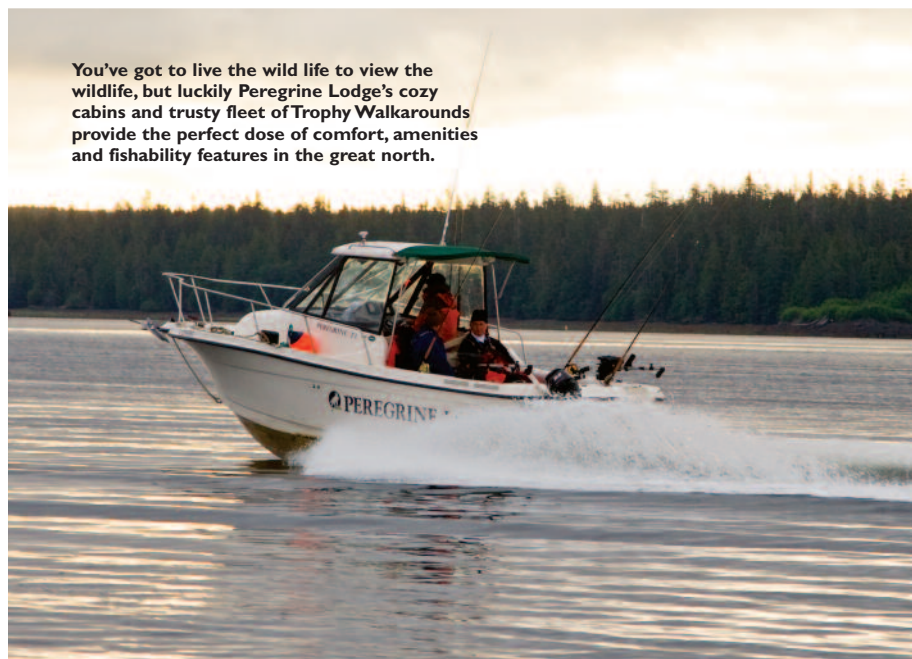
Nick, a 14-year-old from the East Coast, begged his grandfather, James Roemer, to bring him to Peregrine after hearing his tales of a previous trip, boating salmon and halibut on the Dixon Entrance just a hair south of Alaska's panhandle. Peregrine Lodge and its long dock flanked by a fleet of Trophy Walkarounds sits on the shores of Virago Sound on Graham Island, the northernmost island of the archipelago.

The Queen Charlottes, or Haida Gwaii, "Islands of the People," were long known by an older name in the Haida language, *Xhaaidlagha Gwaayaa'i*, which translates to "The Islands at the Boundary of the World." For folks like Nick and his grandfather, who took two planes and a Helijet to get here, the latter title seems more accurate. "I was kind of surprised he wanted to come," says James of his grandson, "but it's a great place for some one-on-one time."

For others, getting here reinvents that old journey-destination saying, making it truly about both. Take, for instance, Captain Kirk Hawley, Trophy's brand manager, and Rod Nau, regional Trophy salesman and tourney fisherman out of Bellingham, Washington. Subsisting on bear sausage recently acquired on an impromptu hunt, they show up from the states after an epic three-day fishing run, often battling 30- to 40-mph



**You've got to live the wild life to view the wildlife, but luckily Peregrine Lodge's cozy cabins and trusty fleet of Trophy Walkarounds provide the perfect dose of comfort, amenities and fishability features in the great north.**



winds, on Rod's 2802 Walkaround, the *Nau-T-Cat*. With them are buddies Mike McAuley and Scott Kobelin on a 2902, the *Fish 'n Jul*. Upon arrival the previous night, they had slung some impressive salmon onto the dock's cleaning boards. Then they tucked into their berths for a good night's sleep, their boats nestled amongst the lodge's seven Trophy Walkarounds—one 2052 and six 2352s.

"We felt the need for larger boats for more comfort," says Paul, giving me a tour post-breakfast. "They're a great fishing boat. Well laid out, just the right size." Peregrine is a fully guided lodge and provides all of the equipment necessary for a day out on the water, including rubber boots, bibs, additional rain gear and a gourmet sack lunch. "You can't run to Home Depot," Paul says, walking me over to the dry room to get suited up. "It's very rustic. We do a pretty good job of looking after each other."

My captain and fishing guide, Dale Oullette, hails from central British Columbia. He lives on the island, guides throughout the fishing season, then heads back to his family in the winter. The long hours he's logged on the water and at the helm show in the way he handles every detail. After a run north and then west, he positions us on a one- to two-mph trolling course about half a mile offshore. "The slower the better for big chinook," he says. "Chinook, they're the ultimate." His job might seem relaxing—a day on the water, catching fish in a surreal setting—but with tendrils of kelp to maneuver around, it's a feat of ultimate multitasking. "It's a real annoyance out here," he says, running back to the helm in the midst of setting up a downrigger. In mid-July, Dale uses a 12-pound ball for fishing about 40 feet down. At the aft bait-prep station he prepares cut-plug herring—an art that produces an enticing spiral in the water.

"Did you put your \$10 in for the salmon pool?" he asks, handing me the knife to slip the guts out of another. "Nah," I chuckle, gesturing to our competition trolling in the foggy distance. We notice a black bear lumbering from the forest to fish the shoreline and track it for a minute before getting distracted by a sea lion waiting in vain for some sun on the rocks. We toss it herring, hoping it'll move to a better spot for a photo op, but it just lifts its head as if to remind us, "Kids, this isn't Sea World."

## >> INSIDE ANGLE

Not sure at which angle to decapitate your herring? "Depends on your target," says Rod Nau. "A blunter cut will produce a slower spin for the bigger guys." Rod and Kirk always check their spiral in the water before serving it up.







Perhaps it was the pod of breaching whales or the eagle that came to greet us earlier that gave me such a notion.

I'm thinking about the black bear again when the portside 'rigger catches our attention. Suddenly, I'm struggling to keep my balance while something big lugs me around the boat. My breath, visible in the cold air, becomes more labored as the dispute intensifies, and my right bicep starts to burn. We've determined our opponent is a salmon, and Dale, a brotherly sort of coach, reminds me to maintain that perfect amount of tension—to tap into the give and take of it all. I reel and hold him, then let him run a little and reel some more. "Wow, my arm hurts," I say to Dale about 15 minutes in. "Don't be a girl!" he shoots back with a smile. He's definitely not coming to my aid. Five minutes later, when the fish is ready for heaving over the gunnel, Dale helps get my spring onboard. Like a girl, I squeal. It's huge!

We head farther west to where the *Nau-T-Cat* has been plying the waters, waving to other lodge fishermen along the way. Earlier we watched Kirk boat and release a very small halibut, and I'm eager to see if they've had better luck, and to brag, of course, like a man.

So far, I've trumped them. They invite me onto their boat for a while—probably for good luck. Tom Petty on the stereo sets the tone for a blithe day on the water, but a closer look reveals a tight operation. They've returned to a spot where the day before—because of a tide change—the



salmon took notice of their bait around 3 p.m. "It was psycho," Rod recalls. Kirk keeps checking his watch and has an arsenal of herring at the ready.

Like brothers who've played a few too many tricks—several this morning—they've drawn an imaginary line down the cockpit's center, each handling a downrigger while Kirk steers the twin kickers as they pass a bait knife between them.

And like with brothers, boundaries go up in smoke when all hell breaks loose, as in when Rod hooks up with a coho. The fish carts him across the cockpit, and Kirk helps Rod pass under his own line before securing the net and the coho in a seamless move. From there, the bite is on. Rod looks back, flashing me an I-told-you-so grin. He's the kind of guy who knows everyone, and they've all got a story to tell about him. Kirk is quieter, revealing only a tale about encountering that sausage-bound bear while hiking a trail with his son.

Basically, he's the kind of guy people on "Survivor" wish they were. But, "he has to have his milk and cookies before bedtime," says Rod—a statement that Kirk does not deny.

Luckily, the lodge has just that available upon return from the day's adventure. Paul and Dave morphed the establishment from a former logging camp into a guiding lodge in 1987. "We realized we had an asset up here," says Paul. I'll admit, based on my catch tally of a 39-pound spring and a modest size halibut for the day, I'd say the fishing's pretty good, but it's the hospitality and the accommodations that have people booking the chopper. "We have 75 percent repeat business," says Paul. "We have guests who have been coming back since the day we opened." Peregrine built entirely new lodges in 2001, and the main cabin houses a cozy dining room, central fireplace, bar and gathering area where guests are treated as part of the family.

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Doug Raffan has been the lodge manager since 1998. "He's not only personable, he's the dad to all of these guys," Paul remarks of how Doug looks after the guides like Dale and Randy Cramer, who's the lodge's sort of master and commander for when the boats are out on the water as well as Peregrine's intrepid winter caretaker. Doug injects the lodge with a personality bigger than the island it resides on. He plays the bagpipes at dinner, remembers guests' names and provides golf cart rides down Peregrine's long dock. He also harasses me relentlessly and encourages the rest of the lodge to do so, too, when he finds out my spring topped out the salmon leaderboard—not only for the day but for the whole trip—and I neglected to enter the salmon pool. "In this case," says fisherman Will Fedirko, "the one that got away was the prize money."

I comfort myself with a delectable slice of baked Alaska—again finding myself eating with Nick and his grandfather. "We had a good one on at one time," Nick says as we swap tales of the day. "You learn a lot," he says later, and I realize he isn't talking about the fishing anymore. "You learn a lot, whether it's about yourself or the person you came with. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

**For more information about Peregrine Lodge, visit [www.peregrinelodge.com](http://www.peregrinelodge.com) or call (800) 663-0992.**



(Top, left to right) Guide Dale Oullette relishes another day on the job; Kirk Hawley and Rod Nau send a salmon back to its watery home. (Here) The misty forests of Haida Gwaii stretch on, obscuring mossy dens, rushing creeks and flourishing lily ponds.