

MOVING NATURES: Mobility and the Environment in Canadian History Edited by Ben Bradley, Jay Young, and Colin M. Coates

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Views from the Deck: Union Steamship Cruises on Canada's Pacific Coast, 1889–1958

J.I. Little

As the main lifeline of the British Columbia coast from the late nineteenth century until the late 1950s, Vancouver's Union Steamship Company (USC) fleet carried not only freight and workers to and from the lumber camps, salmon canneries, and larger industrial sites of the north Pacific coast, but also tourists attracted largely by the views from the deck as described by the company's promotional brochures. According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's much-repeated observation, the new modes of travel associated with the steam era altered passengers' perception by superimposing modern metropolitan concepts of time and space over traditional local ones.¹ But this was much more the case for railway trains, with their high speeds on fixed tracks, than for steamships, which travelled at relatively slow and varying speeds through the same spaces as vessels that depended on wind or muscle power. In the case of the USC, its relatively small ships followed routes that took them up long, narrow coastal inlets, where they waited for high tides to penetrate the smaller harbours.² Prior to the introduction

of radar to the coastal vessels in 1946, the connection to natural landscapes remained strong as the navigators—sometimes referred to as fog wizards—“read” the surrounding fog-enshrouded terrain by listening to the varying resonances of the echo from the ship’s whistle.³ Neither the views nor the passengers’ experiences changed a great deal during the years of the USC’s operation, but what readers of the promotional brochures were directed to see and experience did evolve—the primary focus shifted from the picturesque to the industrial and, finally, to the therapeutic—with the chief constant being that coastal inhabitants and workers continued to be largely ignored. Although certain views went in and out of fashion, the brief and condescending descriptions of the First Nations people and their villages reveal how the colonization of space by capital was more than simply a physical process as far as Canada’s West Coast province was concerned.⁴

Prior to the late nineteenth century, sea voyages were associated with boredom, discomfort, and danger, but historian Frances Steel notes that “with advances in ship-building, new forms of ship ownership in the large-scale, bureaucratic operational structures of shipping companies, the emergence and popularisation of the package tour, growing economic prosperity and middle-class access to leisure time, cruising developed on a commercial scale.”⁵ Spurred by enthusiastic descriptions by travellers such as the naturalist John Muir, American tourists were already flocking to Alaska by the time the transcontinental rail connection led to the founding of the port city of Vancouver in 1885.⁶ California’s Pacific Coast Steamship Company had initiated tourist-specific voyages a year earlier, and in 1890 alone more than five thousand passengers boarded ships that navigated through the islands and fjords of the Inside Passage to Alaska.⁷ Not surprisingly, the founding prospectus of the Vancouver-based USC, published in 1889, recognized the value of this traffic, noting that “the tourist travel which is now very considerable, must rapidly increase. The want of a steamer adapted for this purpose, and excursions amongst the grand scenery of the North, is felt during the summer months.”⁸

The following year, in 1890, the British-owned company joined the tourist trade on a more local scale by acquiring the *Cutch*, a luxury yacht originally built for an Indian maharaja. The *Cutch*’s main role

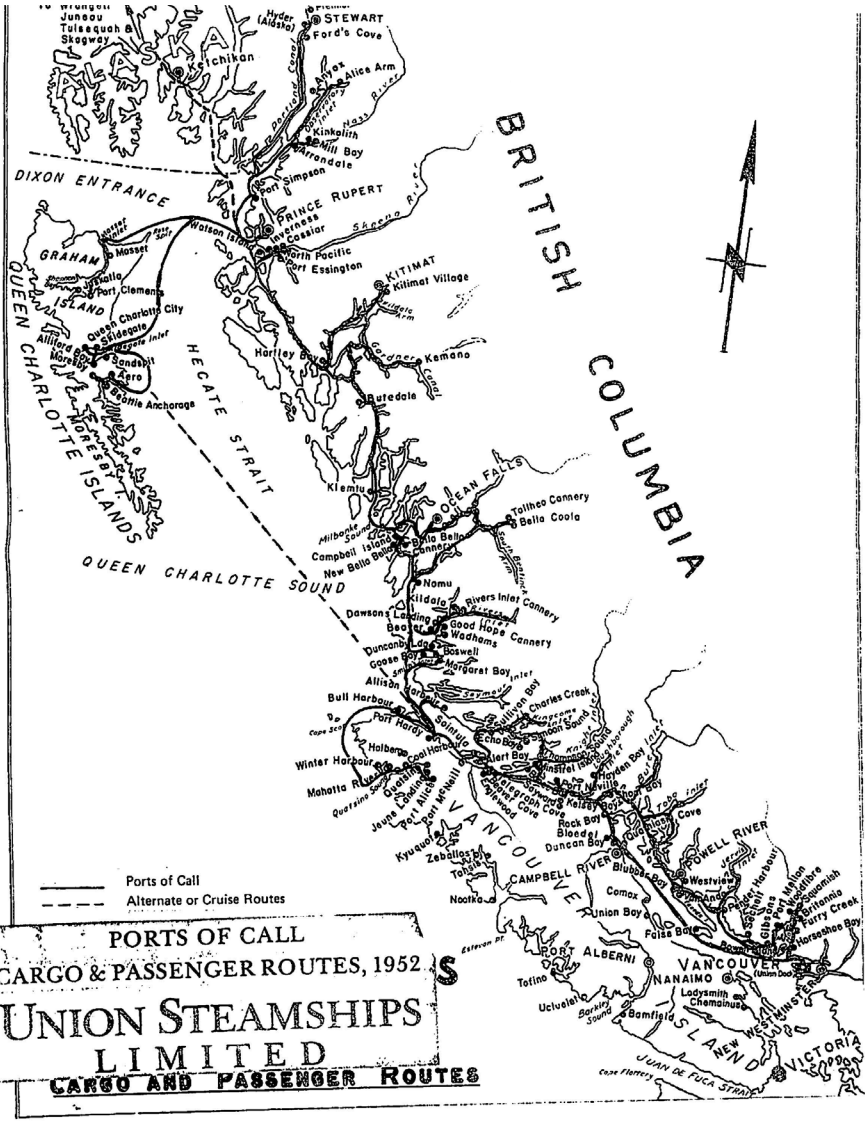


FIGURE 8.1. Map of Union Steamship Company routes in the long and narrow inlets along the BC coast from Vancouver to Stewart, as well as Alaska and what were then known as the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1952. Courtesy of Vancouver Maritime Museum.

was to serve the run from Vancouver to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, but on summer Saturdays it carried hundreds of city residents to nearby sandy beaches that had float landings, and in July 1891 it made its first excursion north to Pender Harbour on the nearby Sunshine Coast. The notice for the cruise of 250 passengers read as follows: “*Cutch* to Pender Harbour off Jervis Inlet—that little bay is noted for its scenery. While on the way the vessel will pass Bowen Island, Howe Sound, Sechelt Indian Village, Trail Bay, Welcome Pass, Texada Island and other places of interest.”⁹ The following month, under the auspices of the Vancouver Women’s Hospital Society, the *Cutch* made the first USC excursion to the Squamish Valley, at the head of Howe Sound (fig. 8.1).¹⁰

The USC soon left the southern Vancouver Island routes to its rivals—the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company of Victoria and the Vancouver fleet of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company—to focus instead on the small settlements along the indented coastline from Vancouver to Prince Rupert and beyond.¹¹ The USC made its first appeal to tourists in 1894, when it printed the account of “W.G.F.,” a British travel writer who claimed to have found his fellow passengers on the northern run to be “not only civil, but in some cases interesting.” The USC was known for its linen tablecloths, silver cutlery, and appetizing meals served by stewards in starched uniforms, but it did not yet have ships dedicated exclusively to the tourist trade; thus, its fleet was—during the summer, at least—a somewhat unusual hybrid of cruise ship and commercial vessel.¹² Needless to say, neither W.G.F. nor any other promotional writer made reference to the pigs, chickens, and other livestock transported to coastal settlements, or to the loggers who were generally drunk and rowdy as they left the skid-row hotels of Vancouver.¹³ Indigenous and Chinese deck passengers would also be ignored, but W.G.F. did describe the First Nations settlements as a colourful and exotic part of the coastal landscape. He wrote, for example, that the Catholic bishop dropped off at Sechelt was welcomed by “the strains of music furnished by the native band, whose members are shining like the Stars, in gold lace in a firmament of blue cloth.” Later in the journey, at Green Point, the vessel arrived during a potlatch, inspiring W.G.F. to write, “we are amused at the ingenuity of the squaws, who to be rid of their maternal cares, have planted their dusky sucklings

in a long trough where, clad in parti-coloured dresses, the youngsters look in the distance like a row of human flowers.”¹⁴ Dehumanizing as this language is, it is certainly more positive than that of the censorious descriptions by earlier travellers who had recorded their impressions of British Columbia.¹⁵

Otherwise, W.G.F. adhered closely to the picturesque convention favoured by the British officials, gunboat officers, and gold seekers who had arrived in the West Coast colony during the mid-nineteenth century. More appropriate to the pastoral English countryside than to the mountainous terrain of the Pacific Northwest, the appeal of the picturesque perspective, as Simon Ryan has observed of Australian exploration narratives, was that it tamed the colonial landscape’s “threatening vastness and unfamiliarity.”¹⁶ A key characteristic of the picturesque scene is its paintability, and one of the most distinguishing features of the early promotional literature produced for the USC was colour, as seen in W.G.F.’s descriptions of the Aborigines at Sechelt and Green Point, noted above, as well as in his images of the coastal landscape.

Thus, after departing from Sechelt, having passed beyond the Hole-in-the-Wall, W.G.F. reported that “no scenic painter could conceive the beautiful effects furnished by such an archipelago of inlets, clad in moss and stately trees, flushed by the dawn.” Less picturesque in the conventional sense was the coastline, where the massive Coast Range rose up directly from the shore. W.G.F. emphasized the massive scale of this landscape, but rather than describing it as overwhelming or terrifying, in conformity with conventions of the sublime, he wrote, “We sail on, past huge fir-covered mountains where snowy heads rest against the deep blue sky above, through virgin seas and deserted spaces where the steamer’s whistle, reverberating through the hills, puts up flocks of wild duck.” W.G.F. viewed even the rough lumber camps that scarred the hillsides as picturesque, noting how “teams comprising sixteen or more huge patient oxen haul down the forest giants, whilst big hirsute men with spiked boots and long poles dance over the floating logs as they arrange them into booms.”¹⁷ Jonas Larsen refers to such landscape descriptions as the “cinematic vision”—one characterized by “totalities and fluid rhythms” as opposed to foregrounds, details, and orderliness—but they also reflect the nineteenth-century evolution



FIGURE 8.2. Aboriginal cannery workers face crowded conditions on the deck of the *Camosun*, the Union Steamship Company's first large ship to serve Prince Rupert and other northern ports, c. 1923. Courtesy of Vancouver Maritime Museum.

of the English picturesque to favour the wild over the pastoral, and woodsmen over peasants.¹⁸ By dividing the passing terrain into a series of scenes viewed from the relative safety of a steam-powered ship, however, W.G.F.'s descriptions reassured his readers that human forces could bring the wilderness under orderly control.

Between 1897 and 1900, the USC focused its attention on the Klondike gold rush, and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, it expanded its fleet to serve the growing cannery and logging market. According to one admiring account, "the Union company did for the coast what the CPR did for the country."¹⁹ But the company did not neglect the tourist trade; in 1916, it published Aitken Tweedale's *North by West in the Sunlight*, in which the author described his six-day voyage from Vancouver to Alice Arm (near the Alaska Panhandle) in the same picturesque terms as had W.G.F. Clearly from a similarly privileged British background as his predecessor, Tweedale had sailed on the *Venture*, a fifty-five-metre ship with a cargo capacity of 495 metric tons, which was licensed for 186 passengers. In addition to the

sixty-two first-class berths, Tweedale noted, the ship contained extra loggers' berths and deck space for the canning crews—though he failed to note that these crews were Chinese and Aboriginal or to mention them further (fig. 8.2).²⁰

Having slept through the night on departure from Vancouver Island, Tweedale described waking up off Savary Island, “a beautiful spot, very popular with residents of the Coast cities as a summer camp.” In the distance one could see the smoke of the Powell River pulp and paper mill “whose products are shipped around the world,” but rather than describing its appearance, Tweedale wrote, “The combination suggested a simile: – Savary Island expressing ease, rest, and pleasure—Powell River, the fretful energy of commerce which makes possible the enjoyment of existence.” Quickly dropping the subject of the mill, Tweedale continued: “The sun by now was coming to his power, glorying the mysteries of hill and mountain along the Coast range, tinting and lighting up some peak rising above the mists of morning, and exposing Mount Alfred (8,540 ft.), as a Goliath among Davids.” As for the port side and the view of Vancouver Island, “shadows brooded between the mountains, but the sparkling waters leapt laughingly, up to her sides, and in their lightness emphasized the grandeur and vastness of scale on which Nature has fashioned this Pearl of the Pacific.”²¹ There is clearly a hint of the sublime in this passage, but one that has been tamed by “lightness” and harmony.²²

The verbal images in *North by West in the Sunlight* become particularly colourful at the point of the ship's entry to Queen Charlotte Sound. From the “wonderful vista of gem-like islets, round which the waters play in a million white-frothed wavelets,” Tweedale's gaze swept to “larger islands, covered with the foliage of that green whose marvellous tint is too elusive for description; then beyond, sloping mainland, with the foot-hills bathed in a gentle mist, leading up to the majestic mountains in the background, crowned by the eternal snows.”²³ Focusing on Cormorant Island's Alert Bay, Tweedale remarked that growing on the “exceedingly rich” soil were maples and other trees with “shades of palest yellow, tawny golds, and brilliant greens, while the crimsons of last year yet remained in occasional vivid glimpses.”²⁴ Tweedale also adhered to his painterly perspective in describing the

local Kwakwaka'wakw village. Midway between the fishing boats on the shore and the "would-be civilized houses, in divers shapes and many angled," was "a riot of red, blue, green and yellow, as displayed in the clothing and blankets of the tribe." At a time when Emily Carr was producing painstakingly accurate images of what she considered to be artifacts of a dying culture, Tweedale added simply that "intermingling with this colouring, and towering over all, stood the famous Totem poles, carved in the usual fantastic designs and very gaudily coloured. . . . From an artistic point of view, the tone effect was superb."²⁵

Tweedale had less opportunity for such picturesque descriptions once the ship reached open water, but after it entered the Inside Passage he turned briefly to the therapeutic theme when he wrote that Bella Bella "is a spot full of charm in its situation, set in a harbour rich in natural beauties, ideal for the lotus-eater, or he who needs rest for a tired brain." After describing an Aboriginal cemetery at China Hat (Klemtu) as "strangely unreal amid the brightness of life expressed by the gleam of the sunlight, the verdance of trees, and the clear light of water," Tweedale returned to the comfortingly familiar as the *Venture* entered "a channel broad as the Thames at Oxford; on either bank gently sloping foliage to the edge, cut, just at the water line, by a basin-like rim of rock, sombre green in tint." In fact, Nature had proved herself "the greatest landscape gardener" by creating a series of circular islands, "so regular as to be almost uncanny" and "nearly in the dead-centre of the channel."²⁶

Tweedale slipped briefly into the sublime at Butedale on Princess Royal Island, where he described how the mist from a light shower "gave sufficient haze to convey to the eye of the beholder an impression of might and majesty even beyond reality." The moment was fleeting, however, for it was followed by "a transformation of scene unequalled on the stage of a theatre," namely, the appearance of Butedale Falls "unveiled to us in all their glory, slowly opening through the haze, modest as a bride in her bridal attire." To complete the sexualized image, Tweedale then referred to a "scintillating light" that "pierced the mist as clearly as an arrow shaft, and lit directly on the Falls."²⁷

Despite his primary emphasis on distant, apparently unsettled landscapes, Tweedale did express some interest in the Skeena River

salmon canneries. His readers learned little about them, however, aside from the fact that the fishermen who brought “the sparkling cargoes to the wharf” were mostly Japanese or Aboriginal, and the canneries supplied “the markets of the world.”²⁸ As for Prince Rupert, it was obviously assumed to be of little interest; readers were simply informed that they could “easily obtain every possible information relative thereto from official sources.” Tweedale implied that travellers would be more attracted to the neighbouring Aboriginal village of Metlakatla, which offered the contrast of the “dying past.”²⁹

Reassuringly, if paradoxically, as the *Venture* headed further north, Tweedale depicted the landscape as being of a type increasingly familiar to the British tourist. Resorting to landscape associationism,³⁰ he described how the ship “passed bays beautiful as the famed Scottish Lochs, – islets as sunny as in the Grecian Seas.” In Port Simpson, “the quaint, snug situation and white houses . . . reminded of some village in Devon or Cornwall, but for the towering mountains in the background.” Paradoxically, again, the most industrialized landscape of the route was near its distant terminus. After stating that he would “forbear” providing a detailed description of the Granby copper works, Tweedale described its “great smelter at Anyox with its tireless daily and nightly industry, emitting aloft a continuous smoke spreading in light green-black filament against the white crowns of the mountains, snow-topped the year round.” Here, Tweedale is resorting to what Leo Marx refers to as the rhetoric of the technological sublime, in which “the awe and reverence . . . bestowed upon the visible landscape is directed . . . toward the technological conquest of matter.”³¹ In fact, Tweedale’s colourful description might almost be labelled the technological picturesque. Not only did he convert into a painterly scene a heavily polluting industry that had killed nearly forty million cubic feet of hemlock timber, he also sentimentalized that scene with his description of “the railway with its toy-like engines, puffing and snorting from wharf to smelter, from smelter to mine, in never-ceasing journeying.”³²

Tweedale’s imaginative creation of a picturesque landscape at Anyox is an example of how, in the words of historian Catherine Cocks, scenic tourism rested on “the understanding of nature as the privileged locus of a solitary and refining act of communion” that

“stood opposed to the market-driven exploitation of natural resources typical of American expansion and industrialization.”³³ But the more modernist sensibility of the post-World War I era tended to eschew sentimentality, and in 1923, only seven years after the publication of Tweedale’s *North by West*, Stuart Rushton’s unimaginatively titled *Our Coastal Trips* made considerably less effort to depict the industrial as picturesque.³⁴ Rushton—the son of the titled mayor of Liverpool—had a class background similar to that of the USC’s earlier advertisers, yet, as a long-term USC employee, he was aware that Tweedale’s “extravagantly colourful” prose (to use Rushton’s own words) had lost much of its charm.³⁵ Rushton did sprinkle some of Tweedale’s phrases throughout his own considerably longer publication, but the following statement is more characteristic: “Famous salmon canneries of the Skeena and Naas rivers cannot fail to provide unbounded interest, and such growing centres of industry as Ocean Falls, Swanson Bay, Surf Inlet, Prince Rupert, Anyox, and Stewart, apart from the commercial aspect, will be a revelation to the tourist.”³⁶ In contrast to Tweedale’s evocation of a benign romantic Nature, then, Rushton celebrated its mastery by technology and human skill. And, with the booklet’s photographs of paper mills, canneries, and logging operations, as well as of the city of Prince Rupert, *Our Coastal Trips* also supported the primary goal of provincial tourism promoters: attracting economic investment.³⁷

In a distinctly prosaic fashion, *Our Coastal Trips* made exaggerated claims—for example, that “canned salmon is very nutritious and contains a greater amount of food element than any other similar product.” Rushton also assured prospective travellers that they would have “a fine opportunity of viewing the actual canning operations . . . and will doubtless be surprised at the scientific methods now employed in the process” (fig. 8.3).³⁸ As for the lumber industry, British Columbia was said to be “endowed with the richest timber belts and forests to be found in any part of the world.” This resource was “almost, one might say, unlimited,” as well as being “located at easily accessible points to tidewater.” As a result, “both tourist and traveller on this coast has [*sic*] the great facility of viewing at first hand, and with scarcely any additional travel or expense, the operations of this vast industry on the Pacific North-west.” Passengers could observe the logger at work “in



FIGURE 8.3. The S.S. *Cardena*, seen here at the Butedale salmon cannery (c. 1935), had a 350-ton cargo capacity, had refrigeration for thirty tons of boxed fish, and could carry eleven thousand cases of canned salmon. It was also licensed to carry 250 passengers. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.

the developments which take place in rapid succession from the moment when the tree is felled till the log is eventually towed down in the well-known booms and log-rafts to the marketing entrepôts where the big mills are located.” Rushton clearly did not have in mind the primitive operations of the hand loggers who were scattered along the coast, for readers were assured that the “scientific progress in the method of logging during recent years” would be an “eye-opener.”³⁹

Rushton devoted a little more space than had Tweedale to the Indigenous population, writing of Alert Bay that “in addition to the permanent inhabitants, it becomes a rendezvous in the summer months for large numbers of Indians from neighbouring reserves, who earn much of their livelihood during the fish-canning season.” But Aboriginals were largely excluded from the progressive image that



FIGURE 8.4. Crowded conditions for tourists aboard one of the corvettes purchased by the United Steamship Company after World War II. Note the gun turret on the bow—and the cruises' popularity with young women. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.

tourism promoters were fashioning for the province during this era, and Rushton's publication is no exception.⁴⁰ While it alludes to Alert Bay's hospital and "Indian school," it quickly shifts to the traditional view of the tourism industry, adding that passengers who took advantage of the short time available to go ashore "will see the lodges and picturesque colored garb of the Indians. Of particular interest will be some fine totem poles, specimens of which have been pronounced amongst the finest extant on the American continent."⁴¹

As for other stops on the first of two six-day itineraries up the coast, Rushton described Prince Rupert in considerable detail, noting that it was the northern terminus of the Canadian National Railway, that it had "an extensive shipbuilding plant" as well as a dry dock, and that its busy commercial harbour was fourteen miles in length.⁴² The second of the two available six-day trips travelled into Rivers Inlet and up the Burke Channel to Bella Coola, Kimsquit, and Ocean Falls. Aside from its somewhat greater emphasis on the scenery and the hunting and fishing possibilities, this route had only one novel feature: the "fruitful nature" of the valley, with its mixed farms, orchards, and ranches extending over 160 kilometres inland. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the odour that pulp and paper mills emit, Ocean Falls was passed over more quickly than some of the smaller industrial centres.⁴³ Whether or not Rushton's focus on the coast's industrial sites sparked the interest of many tourists, the northern cruises were certainly popular, according to his history of the USC: "The response was so great that it soon became necessary to limit the number of tourists on each sailing to leave space for the regular travellers and settlers" (fig. 8.4).⁴⁴

In addition to the northern routes, more southerly semi-weekly cruises served resource and industrial communities closer to Vancouver. Although Rushton's 1923 tourist brochure stated that passengers on the weekend cruise to Toba Inlet, Cortez Island, and Lewis Channel would pass through "one of Nature's fairylands," he added that they would also be able to observe mining and logging operations as well as canneries.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the round trip to Loughborough Inlet and Toba Inlet included several harbours "with seemingly impossible entrances," such as Granite Bay, where "the skilful pilot guides the vessel between rocky shores scarcely the steamer's length apart." The main tourist



FIGURE 8.5. Excursionists aboard the *Lady Alexandra*. As shown, they are not paying much attention to the Britannia Mine, which was advertised as a feature attraction on the tour of Howe Sound. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives.

attraction, then, was the pilot's technical skills rather the environment itself, and Rushton drove the point home, noting that logging operations, "especially at Grasse Bay, which has a fine railed wharf, will remind one yet again of man's gradual assertion over nature."⁴⁶

Finally, the third category of excursions offered by the USC was the day cruise aimed almost exclusively at the recreation and tourist market. The main focus of these cruises was the company's resorts in Howe Sound and on the Sunshine Coast, but Rushton did not neglect the local industrial landscape.⁴⁷ Advertising the excursion to the head of Howe Sound, which was the southern terminus of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (the future BC Rail), his 1923 brochure noted that ports of call included Porteau, which was "the location of Deek's Gravel Co."; Woodfibre, which was "the site of an extensive modern plant of

the Whalen Pulp and Paper Company, Limited”; Britannia, which was “the headquarters of one of the largest copper deposits in the world”; and finally Squamish, where “local activities, besides railroad work, comprise logging, lumbering and mining” (fig. 8.5).⁴⁸

The USC’s entry into the resort business in the 1920s did not deter it from carrying tourists on its northern runs, however, if only because centralized production was causing the company to lose its advantage over its larger competitors in the industrial market.⁴⁹ Further, as the coast was increasingly depopulated, the ability of the USC’s small ships to navigate the narrow inlets meant less and less to the commercial market, making the tourist trade all the more important.⁵⁰ In *Cruising the Coast of Romance*, printed in 1928, the new company manager, Harold Brown, asserted that “each week splendidly appointed steamers leave the Union Dock on delightful cruises through the coastal fjords and thrilling inland waterways, bound for the ‘mysterious Northland.’” Rather than drawing attention to the stops at the remaining logging camps and industrial sites, Brown appealed to a concern prevalent among business and professional classes since the late nineteenth century: that the pressures of urban life were leading to nervous prostration, identified as neurasthenia.⁵¹ Brown informed his readers that “the real value of a holiday lies in the complete detachment from the cares and stress of modern business life. In these inspirational cruises through the still waters and silver distances of the Coast Sea-Trails is to be found the most satisfying repose for body and mind.”⁵² Romance had clearly returned as a central theme of the coastal experience, but in a more hedonistic guise than the earlier aesthetic focus on the picturesque view. And the Great Depression did little to change this tone. In 1936, for example, Brown’s *10 Magic Trips by Union Ships* promised that “everyday cares” would be quickly forgotten as “the city fades into a mere speck in the presence of this vast untrammelled adventure-land tingling with romance.” To enhance the escapist theme, Brown added that “many of the routes follow little known channels and inlets. You have the feeling of steering the same bold course as Captain Vancouver through uncharted seas.”⁵³

After Brown retired as USC manager in 1939, the company relied largely on Vancouver newspapers for its publicity. The war years

brought a revival of the coastal shipping trade as the forest sector boomed, but all tourist traffic on overnight sailings was suspended for safety reasons.⁵⁴ Gasoline restrictions for automobiles nevertheless made short excursions to Bowen Island and Howe Sound more popular than ever, particularly for shift workers in the shipbuilding and other defence industries, as well as off-duty servicemen and their families who were allowed to take brief vacations only.⁵⁵ In 1940, when Vancouver's population was approximately 275,000, Union Pier saw 210,651 passengers embark on company vessels. To place this number in further perspective, only 298,076 American tourists crossed the border south of Vancouver that year, and rubber and fuel rationing would cause that number to decline during the following three years. For the twelve months ending on January 31, 1943, the USC reported a record high of 472,066 passengers—some of them on the increasingly infamous Saturday night “booze cruises” to the company's dance pavilion on Bowen Island.⁵⁶

After the war ended, the purchase of three speedy corvettes to serve the northern routes rejuvenated the aging fleet, bringing “New Standards of Luxury to BC Coast Travel.”⁵⁷ These ships were popular with tourists, though one American later recalled that the six-and-a-half-day trip to Stewart was “one of continual rush and push” (fig. 8.6).⁵⁸ More relaxing was the ten-day Alaska cruise dedicated solely to the tourist trade. Judging from the tourist guidebook printed in 1957, its main attraction was the spectacular scenery, especially the glaciers, though brief stops for sightseeing were made at industrial sites such as Kitimat and Ketchikan, the “Salmon Canning Capital of the World” as well as the site of a “huge pulp industry.”⁵⁹ Rushton claimed that this was the most successful cruise venture ever developed by the company, but he also stated that the purchase of the three ships was a costly mistake because of high conversion costs and fuel consumption, as well as limited cargo space.⁶⁰ The writing was on the wall in any case, for the tourist season lasted only five months and the company's freight and passenger service could not compete with improvements in roads or airline and barge services.⁶¹ In addition, the Howe Sound resorts fell victim to the automobile; families sought more private holidays after gas rationing ended, and the W.A.C. Bennett government began to

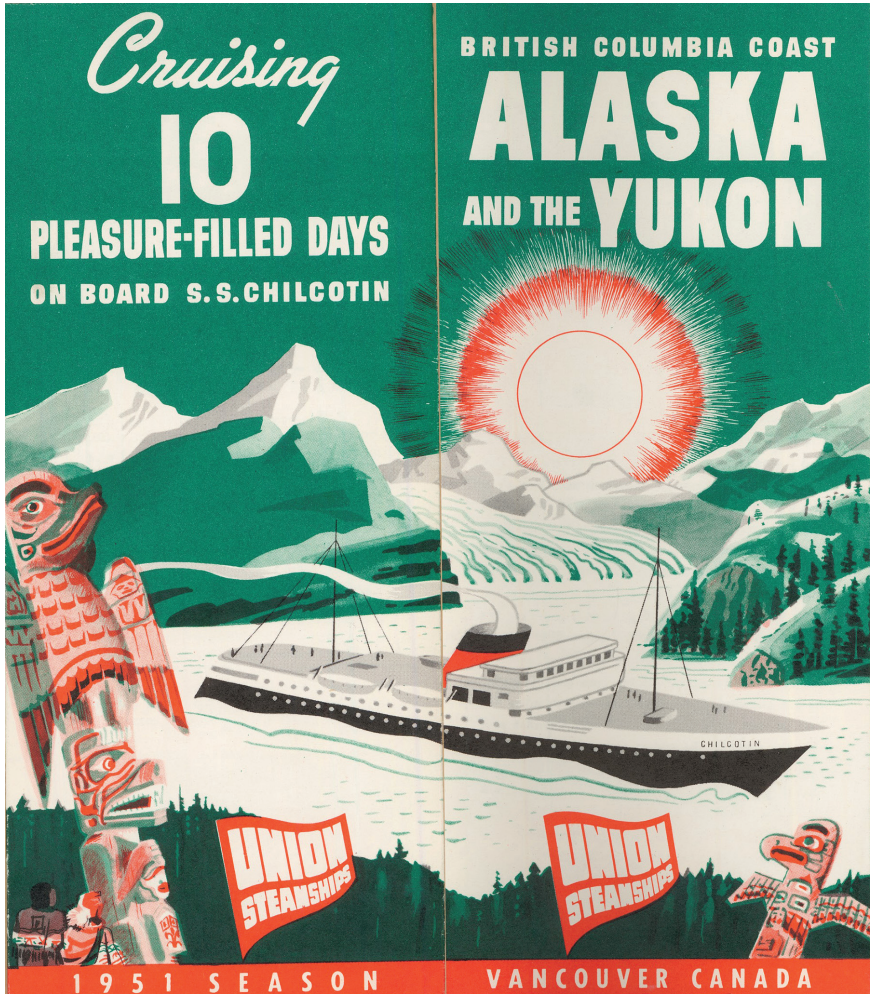


FIGURE 8.6. The S.S. *Chilcotin*, a Castle-class corvette built for service in the war, was converted in 1947 for summer cruises to Alaska, with 106 first-class berths and a license for two hundred passengers. Note the totem poles, which had come to symbolize BC tourism by this time. Courtesy of Vancouver Maritime Museum.

improve the province's road network.⁶² Another crippling blow was a two-month strike against the USC during the 1955 peak tourist season, which cost the company an estimated seven hundred thousand dollars.⁶³ The USC finally terminated all subsidized passenger service

early in 1958, after the federal government refused to increase its annual grant. A year later its new owner, Northland Navigation Company, mothballed the entire fleet.⁶⁴

A sea voyage is generally viewed as a linking of spaces across a void, but the many stops made by USC vessels along the indented coastline provided passengers with the opportunity to experience localities in what Schivelbusch refers to as their “spatial individuality.”⁶⁵ As described by one former coastal resident, the process of landing at a dock had a fascination of its own; she recalled that Captain Andy Johnstone’s ship was like a dancing partner as he docked her: “slide, pivot, swing; glide, reverse, and stop. The stop was always on her toes, dramatic, and to generous applause.”⁶⁶ Similarly, in his semi-fictional *Woodsmen of the West*, published in 1908, Martin Allerdale Grainger describes the following scenes from the deck of a USC steamship:

Every now and again we would see the distant roof of a logging-camp shining yellow through the trees, and hear the whistle of a donkey-engine from where the white puffs of steam would show against the forest green. Then the Cassiar would toot and slow down, and the camp rowboat would put out to intercept us. A whole fleet of hand-loggers’ boats would come out too, and tie up at the steamer’s side for a few hurried minutes while meat and supplies and mail were being thrown into them. We passengers would all lean over the deck-rail above and laugh at little breakages that would occur to freight, and recognise acquaintances in the boats alongside and shout the latest news from Vancouver to them.⁶⁷

An undated interview of former logger Jim Mackay echoes this social aspect of coastal travel, for Mackay fondly recalled how, at a place such as Lasqueti Island,

You’d all go out and hang over the rail, everybody on the island’d be there on the dock, there’d always be someone

you'd know. Charlie Klein'd be tryin' to talk you into gettin' off to help him for a couple of weeks, women'd be screamin' scandal back and forth, some gyppo maybe would be there catchin' freight and guys up on the boat would be after him about work . . . people'd be stumbling along still yappin' as the boat eased back, shouting and waving—and this would go on all the way up the line. . . . The coast in them days was like a buncha people along a street seeing each other all the time on the way by.⁶⁸

In short, as historical geographer Cole Harris has observed, one feature of British Columbia's challenging landscape was that the "lines of industrial transportation became those of social interaction."⁶⁹

Today, much of the BC coast is devoid of habitation, especially non-Indigenous habitation. The exploitation of its natural resources no longer requires local residents due to the newer technology of powerful tugboats, float planes, and radio communications.⁷⁰ But, given the foregoing descriptions by Allerdale and Mackay, one is struck by how little attention the USC tourism brochures paid to the people who then lived along the coast. Passengers on the "Vagabond Cruises" in 1957 were promised that they would "get an intimate glimpse of the coast-life and people, and reach some of the quaintest places imaginable"—but the word "glimpse" is telling.⁷¹ Whereas in Alaska, according to historian Douglas Cole, "Indians and their curios rivalled scenery as the major attraction of the tour," USC publications made only brief references to coastal Aboriginal villages and none at all to any market in Indigenous handicrafts.⁷² The impression created was that contact with coastal life would be fleeting, relying largely on sight rather than the evocative sounds of social interaction or the smells of livestock as described by passengers such as Grainger and Mackay.⁷³

Even though USC cruises failed until the 1950s to promote what was clearly the principal attraction for its American competitors—namely, views of Alaska's glaciers—the company's guidebooks strongly suggest that British Columbia's coastal landscape was the main attraction offered on its tours, whether it be the picturesque landscape of W.G.F.

and Tweedale, the industrial landscape of Rushton, or the therapeutic landscape of Brown. These are what historians Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough refer to as “landscapes of consumption,”⁷⁴ though a consumption presented as self-improvement rather than pleasure for its own sake. Narrow and exclusive as that focus may have been, reading beyond the USC’s guidebooks to the passengers’ own descriptions reveals that the tourists who booked passage on its meandering coastal vessels had a richer, more authentic experience than do those aboard today’s Alaska-bound cruises gazing passively at the rapidly passing coastline from the comfort and distance of their air-conditioned cabins.⁷⁵

Notes

- 1 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 4. Kevin Flynn states that Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) passengers sometimes complained that the train’s speed denied them a stable, easily captured view of the landscape. Kevin Flynn, “Destination Nation: Nineteenth-Century Travels aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway,” *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 67 (1999): 207.
- 2 The majority of the USC’s fifty vessels listed had a maximum speed of nine to twelve knots per hour. The conversion to diesel engines after World War II made little difference to the vessels’ speed. Gerald A. Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet: The Union Steamship Story* (North Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1974), 132–40.
- 3 Tom Henry, *The Good Company: An Affectionate History of the Union Steamships* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1994), 24–25, 38–39; K. Mack Campbell, *Cannery Village, Company Town* (Victoria: Trafford, 2004), 145, 150.
- 4 On this theme, see Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), chap. 6; Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture and Power on Canada’s West Coast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 182–83; and Robert Campbell, *In Darkest Alaska: Travel and Empire along the Inside Passage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- 5 Frances Steel, “An Ocean of Leisure: Early Cruise Tours of the Pacific in an Age of Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14, no. 2 (2012).
- 6 Campbell, *Darkest Alaska*, 58, 71–72, 74–75, 187–88, 218–27, 232–37.

- 7 Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 140; Braun, *Intemperate Rainforest*, 184–86; Campbell, *Darkest Alaska*, 49.
- 8 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 11.
- 9 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 17.
- 10 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 18.
- 11 See Robert D. Turner, *The Pacific Princesses: An Illustrated History of Canadian Pacific Railway's Princess Fleet on the Northwest Coast* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1977); Norman R. Hacking and W. Kaye Lamb, *The Princess Story: A Century and a Half of West Coast Shipping* (Vancouver: Mitchell, 1974). The CPR acquired control of the CPN in 1901.
- 12 Frances Steel ("Ocean of Leisure") refers to only two choices in the South Pacific: independent adventuring on trade vessels or sailing on cruise ships. However, Robert Campbell (*Darkest Alaska*, 114, 184) states that the Alaska cruise ships were also trading ventures, stopping briefly at a number of canneries and mining supply points.
- 13 See Dorothy Faulkner, Elaine Park, and Cathy Jenks, *Women of Pender Harbour: Their Voices, Their History* (Madeira Park, BC: Pender Harbour Living Heritage Society, 2010), 106; Peter Chapman, "Navigating the Coast: A History of the Union Steamship Company," *Sound Heritage* 6, no. 2 (1977): 25–28, 30, 67; and Kelsey McLeod, "The Union Company's Entertaining Ships," *Westcoast Mariner* 3, no.1 (1990): 25–28.
- 14 Quoted in Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 30–31.
- 15 See J.I. Little, "West Coast Picturesque: Class, Gender, and Race in a British Colonial Landscape, 1858–71," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2007): 25–31. By the late nineteenth century, anthropologists such as Franz Boas had begun recording what they believed to be a dying culture. Braun, *Intemperate Rainforest*, 189–90.
- 16 Simon Ryan, "Exploring Aesthetics: The Picturesque Appropriation of Land in Journals of Australian Exploration," *Australian Literary Studies* 15, no. 4 (1992): 282. On the picturesque, see also Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetic and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar, 1989), 56–58; Ian Ousby, *The Englishman's England: Taste, Travel and the Rise of Tourism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 156–57; and William H.A. Williams, *Tourism, Landscape, and the Irish Character: British Travel Writers in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 21–31.
- 17 Quoted in Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 30–31. For an earlier, equally picturesque description of the mountains at Bute Inlet, see Molyneux St. John, *The Sea of Mountains: An Account of Lord Dufferin's Tour through British Columbia in 1876*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1877), 265–68.
- 18 Jonas Larsen, "Tourism Mobilities and the Travel Glance: Experiences of Being On the Move," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 1, no. 2

- (2001): 92; Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, 59.
- 19 Henry, *Good Company*, 8. While the ships carried cargoes of canned salmon to Vancouver, most logs were transported in rafts by tugboats until those were replaced by self-dumping barges in the 1950s. Most lumber appears to have been transported by the Grand Trunk Pacific's ships and trains from centralized locations such as Prince Rupert, Terrace, and Ocean Falls. Richard A. Rajala, *Up-Coast: Forests and Industry on British Columbia's North Coast, 1870–2005* (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 2006), 7, 9, 19, 48, 51–53, 55–56, 109, 151.
- 20 Aitken Tweedale, *North by West in the Sunlight, Being Descriptions of Enjoyable Coasting Tours along the Shores of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Union Steamship Company, 1916); Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 59; Arthur M. Twigg, *Union Steamships Remembered, 1920–1958* (Campbell River, BC: printed by author, 1997), 32. On labour in the canneries, see Dianne Newell, ed., *The Development of the Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry: A Grown Man's Game* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 16–19; and Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1858–1930* (Vancouver: New Star, 1996), 190–200.
- 21 Tweedale, *North by West*, 4–6.
- 22 On the sublime in relation to the Alaska cruises of the late nineteenth century, see Campbell, *Darkest Alaska*, 100–2, 223–24.
- 23 Tweedale, *North by West*, 10.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 11–12. Braun (*Intemperate Rainforest*, chap. 5) argues that, sympathetic as Carr may have been towards the Aboriginal communities she painted, her view was fundamentally a colonialist one.
- 26 Tweedale, *North by West*, 15–16.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 17–18.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 19–20.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 20–21.
- 30 See Greg Gillespie, *Hunting for Empire: Narratives of Sport in Rupert's Land, 1840–70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 83–84.
- 31 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 195–97. See also David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), chap. 5.
- 32 Tweedale, *North by West*, 22–23; Rajala, *Up-Coast*, 64. For a photograph of Anyox in 1928, see Patricia E. Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005), 109. On Juneau's industrial sublime, see Campbell, *Darkest Alaska*, chap. 6.
- 33 Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 124.
- 34 *Our Coastal Trips* (Vancouver: Union Steamship Co., n.d.), 3. No author or date are listed but Rushton states in *Whistle up the Inlet* (p. 87) that he wrote it in 1923. Tweedale also published a travel account directed at sports fishermen and hunters. Aitken Tweedale, *Fin*,

- Feather and Fur on the British Columbia Coast* (Vancouver, n.d. [1918 or 1919]). On post-1914 travel writing, see Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 56–61.
- 35 Jessie M. Van der Burg, “A History of the Union Steamship Company of British Columbia, 1889–1943” (unpublished typescript, n.d. [1943]), pp. 83, 99, Library Collection, Vancouver Maritime Museum (hereafter VMM); Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 82.
- 36 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 3.
- 37 Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), chap. 1.
- 38 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 7–8. Most of the technical advances in salmon canning had been made in the nineteenth century. Newell, *Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry*, 15–16.
- 39 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 11–12.
- 40 Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 72.
- 41 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 5–6.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 8–9.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 10–11. The mill’s newsprint was shipped to distant ports by freighters. For a description of Ocean Falls, see Rajala, *Up-Coast*, 72–77.
- 44 Rushton states that most came from the west coast of the United States, chiefly California, but perhaps a third were from Vancouver, Victoria, and the Prairies. The fare was fifty to sixty dollars. Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 107–8.
- 45 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 3.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 18–24, 30–31. For a detailed study, see J.I. Little, “Vancouver’s Playground: Leisure and Sociability on Bowen Island, 1902–57,” *BC Studies*, no. 171 (2011): 37–67.
- 48 [Rushton], *Our Coastal Trips*, 25. In 1925 the USC joined forces with the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to promote a Sunday “Sea and Rail” excursion, with open railcars, to Brandywine Falls and Alta Lake. See *The Magic Day Sea-Trip through Howe Sound Vancouver’s Glorious Inland Sea*, box 1, file 1, Union Steamship Collection, VMM (hereafter USC Collection); Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 102; and “A Day in a Thousand: The Glorious Sea and Rail Excursion” (USC advertisement), *Vancouver Sun*, 31 July 1926, 22.
- 49 On the USC’s competitors, see Campbell, *Cannery Village*, 145–52.
- 50 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 118, 123, 133. For first-hand accounts of the navigational challenges that the inlets presented, see Chapman, “Navigating the Coast.”
- 51 Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 107–11. According to James Overton, the “therapeutic ethos” became particularly popular in Newfoundland tourism promotion during the 1920s and 1930s. James Overton, *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (Toronto:

- University of Toronto Press, 1971), 16–17, 19.
- 52 [Harold Brown], *Cruising the Coast of Romance*, 1928, p. 48, USCBC fonds, Add MSS 75-510-B-6, City of Vancouver Archives.
- 53 [Harold Brown], *10 Magic Trips by Union Ships*, 1936, USCBC fonds, City of Vancouver Archives.
- 54 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 135, 137; Rajala, *Up-Country*, 106–13.
- 55 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 140.
- 56 Ibid., 125, 135, 140; Irene Howard, *Bowen Island, 1872–1972* (Bowen Island: Bowen Island Historians, 1973), 107; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 117, 126; “Union Steamships Reveals Record Passenger Year,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 June 1943, 20.
- 57 “Special Announcement: Maiden Voyage of the New S.S. *Coquitlam*” (USC advertisement), *Vancouver Sun*, 6 November 1946, 25.
- 58 Clinton H. Betz, “Reminiscences of a Trip to Northern British Columbia aboard S.S. *Camosun*, Union Steamship Company of British Columbia,” in *The Sea Chest*, n.d. [c. 1995], p. 30, box 3, file 3, USC Collection. See also *Freight Book Cruises along the British Columbia Coast Featuring S.S. Cardena*, 1957, in 1949–1958 scrapbook, p. 31, USC Collection.
- 59 For a description, see *Ten Day Cruise Tour to Alaska and the Yukon*, 1957, in 1949–1958 scrapbook, p. 30, USC Collection.
- 60 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 130, 133, 150.
- 61 Ibid., 147–51, 157; Henry, *Good Company*, 128–33; Twigg, *Union Steamships Remembered*, 114–17; Howard White and Jim Spilsbury, *Spilsbury’s Coast: Pioneer Years in the Wet West* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, [1987]), chap. 20.
- 62 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 159–60; Roy and Thompson, *British Columbia*, 151–52. Other factors were the improved standard of living and paid vacations that made it more affordable for members of the working class to travel. Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 4, 130–31; Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 238. On the rise in tourist traffic to the province’s interior, see Ben Bradley, “Behind the Scenery: Manning Park and the Aesthetics of Automobile Accessibility in 1950s British Columbia,” *BC Studies*, no. 170 (2011): 41–65.
- 63 Kelsey McLeod, “The Union Steamship Company of BC: The West Coast Lifeline,” *British Columbia Historical News* 26, no. 3 (1993): 11; “Upcoast Villages Face Food Shortage,” *Vancouver Sun*, 4 July 1955, 1–2.
- 64 Rushton, *Whistle up the Inlet*, 127, 161, 178, 180–81, 187, 190, 195; “Union Ships Up for Sale,” *Daily Province*, 21 December 1957.
- 65 John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 96; Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 197.
- 66 Helen Meilleur, *A Pour of Rain: Reminiscences from a West Coast Fort* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980), 134.
- 67 M. Allerdale Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (1908; Toronto:

- McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 12–13.
- 68 Quoted in Henry, *Good Company*, 31–32.
- 69 Harris, *Resettlement of British Columbia*, 192.
- 70 White and Spilsbury, *Spilsbury's Coast*, 190. On the centralization of the fish-packing industry, see Newell, *Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry*, 19–20.
- 71 *Freight Boat Cruises along the British Columbia Coast*, 1957, in 1949–1958 scrapbook, p. 31, USC Collection.
- 72 Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985), 96–97. See also Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 139, 141, 152–53; and Campbell, *Darkest Alaska*, chap. 5. According to Patricia Jasen, Aboriginal villages were also an important part of the tourist itinerary in Northern Ontario, but Dawson notes that Aboriginal culture was not appropriated by British Columbia's tourism promoters on a regular basis until the 1930s. Jasen, *Wild Things*, 16–20, 84–92; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 163–64.
- 73 Contrast, as well, Irene Todd's romantic sound image of “the whine of block and tackle, the clanking of chains, the splash of water against the wharves, and the chug-chug of the gasoline engines of the halibut fishing boats, and the Indian Salmon fishing boats, that lay out in the path of the moon,” as heard from the deck of a Grand Trunk Pacific steamer docked in Prince Rupert harbour in 1921. Quoted in Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 14–15.
- 74 Shelly Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, introduction to *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelly Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 8.
- 75 For impressions of today's coast by two solitary travellers, see Jonathan Raban, *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and Its Meaning* (New York: Picador, 1999); and Michael Poole, *Ragged Islands: A Journey by Canoe through the Inside Passage* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991).

