

The Voyage of the Tilikum



The Tilikum, pictured at the start of her three year, 6000 mile journey

As you drive past Telopea Drive along the road to Shallow Inlet you pass a couple of roads going off to your left. One of these is called Tilikum Court. It was named after a most unusual boat that sailed into Shallow Inlet over 100 years ago for a short break on an epic round the world journey. The story of how this visit happened has been chronicled by the captain of the ship, John Voss.*

The Tilikum started life as a native dugout canoe, built around 1800 in British Columbia from one large Red Cedar log. It was bought by John Voss in 1903 after accepting a wager from Canadian journalist Norman Luxton to attempt a round the world cruise in a smaller vessel than Joshua Slocum had just achieved in “Spray”. Voss thought the dug out canoe would fit the bill admirably and had her converted into a sailing vessel. She was only 30ft long, 5ft wide and had a freeboard of 22 inches.

The first land they sighted was Penrhyn Island, They then went on to Samoa and Fiji. In Fiji Luxton decided to leave the ship and found a new mate for Voss, Louis Begent, aged thirty-one, a native of Tasmania. Somewhere between Suva and Sydney, during a violent storm the mate was washed overboard, together with the compass and Voss travelled the rest of the way to Sydney on his own, steering by the stars.**

With a new mate his course then took him to Melbourne (via Shallow Inlet), to Adelaide, Hobart, and New Zealand before sailing around the top end of Australia, across the Indian Ocean to Durban in South Africa. He sailed on across the Atlantic to South America and back across the Atlantic to the Azores and finally across the Atlantic to London. The boat was exhibited in London, then sold. It was found neglected on Canvey Island in the Thames in 1926 and taken back to British Columbia, where it is now on permanent exhibition in the Maritime Museum.

Voss's new mate, who was unaccustomed to the motion of the boat became very sea sick. As a result, when they entered what Voss called "Liptrap Bay" and spotted the break in the beach that was then the entrance to Shallow Inlet he decided to investigate. They sailed through the surf into what he thought was the entrance, but later found was not so. They were stuck on a sandbar and the boat nearly broke up before they finally sailed it off and into the calmer waters of the lagoon (Shallow Inlet). There they saw 4 men waving at them from the beach and went ashore.



The Tilikum is now on permanent exhibition in the Maritime Museum in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

"...we accompanied our newly found friends up the beach towards a forest, where four saddle horses were hitched to a tree. My mate and myself were given a mount, and in company of two of our hosts rode for about two miles through the forest. Passing for a like distance over a stretch of grassland we finally arrived at a neat farmstead, which belonged to the two gentlemen who had guided us. They were brothers named Pinkerton,*** Within a very short time of our arrival the table was spread with a sumptuous repast. After two weeks of fasting my mate, who had been compelled to part even with his last meal when the boat was bumping and rolling on the sandbar, certainly did full justice to the good things before him, and remarked at the conclusion of the meal that he felt as well as ever.

After dinner the farmers entertained us with songs and music. Hearing "Life on the Ocean Wave," "When Ireland will have Home Rule," and Jig-jig with the Flapflap" certainly made us feel that we were among friends and welcome, and when I hinted at nine o'clock that it was time for us to return to the boat, these kind people almost compelled us to stop for the night, and even went so far as to ask us to stay for a week or two. They offered us the use of their house and buggy for as long as we liked. ...During our stay the good fellows treated us so well that I almost felt home-sick when we finally sailed for Melbourne, after having enjoyed their hospitality for a whole week."

Diana Cornwell

*The Venturesome Voyages of Captain Voss by Capt John Claus Voss

** Norman Luxton, in a posthumously published biography, accused Voss of throwing Walter (Louis) Begent overboard in a drunken rage.

***They were of course the Pilkington brothers